

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Alexander Hoyle, Graduate Assistant
HB 275**

**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty,
and Graduate Assistants
February 14, 2023**

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

We have been fighting for collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants for decades, and now faculty have joined us in this crucial effort.

I have attached over two-hundred written testimonies submitted in support of graduate assistant collective bargaining rights in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Each letter speaks to the deep personal pain caused by Maryland's systematic denial of basic democratic rights.

There are people who can't see their families abroad because they can't afford to travel. There are others who are forced into unsafe and illegal housing conditions. Still more have suffered workplace abuse that has gone ignored. At the same time, they're held captive: if they leave their jobs early, then the years they've dedicated to their PhD are meaningless. Our international colleagues would face deportation.

As the teachers and researchers at the very heart of the University—and as employees of one of the wealthiest states in the nation—they deserve better.

Sincerely,
Alexander Hoyle
Graduate Assistant

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing to you today to urge your support on SB 658. As a graduate student and graduate teaching assistant at the University of Maryland, I strongly believe this bill will work as an effective means to address many valid concerns of the GAs including unlivable wages, unregulated hours and mental health concerns. Without the collective bargaining rights, the GAs are unable to formally negotiate with the university to address these concerns.

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

The stipend provided for 20 hr/week of work for the university is not sufficient for me. I have worked an additional job on my own time along with the stipend in order to pay my bills. Essentially, I worked the equivalent of a full time job, and then completed additional research and my classes. How can someone experience a healthy and complete life if >80 hr of it every week is used to make ends meet and study?

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing in staunch support of SB 118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. As a former graduate assistant and co-chair of the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC) at the University of Maryland College Park, I both experienced and witnessed firsthand the hardships faced by graduate assistants employed at the university. GAs repeatedly experienced lapses in pay, lapses in health coverage, intimidation from superiors, etc. The existence of the meet-and-confer policy did little to ameliorate these concerns; the very nature of meet-and-confer denies us any actually meaningful influence over university policy and procedure. It is wholly inadequate for dealing with the labor issues that plague the USM.

I ended up dropping out of my American Studies doctoral program this past October. In the face of the mounting costs of living in the DMV, I could no longer justify accepting such measly pay. At the time of my resignation, I was making under 20k a year, not including summers (during which I worked as a Lyft driver and Doordash delivery person in order to make ends meet). Even so, I believe I had a pretty good deal, relative to the aggregate of GAs at UMCP.

I've testified various times over the last couple years in favor of this bill before both the House and the Senate. My position on the matter is clear. I once again implore the members of this committee to see reason and allow this legislation to finally see the light of day.

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Graduate research assistants should not be barred from forming a union, same as any other employees. The university views RAs as students sometimes and employees at other times, depending on what is profitable for the university.

A recent email from UMD admin was sent to faculty to thank them for their hard work during the pandemic. While faculty work to write the grants that bring in millions of dollars to UMD, RAs provide the data that is the backbone and centerpiece of these grants. UMD takes about 54% for overhead costs, but RAs are not paid livable wages for the area. Without RAs doing the science, this income source collapses. Yet, RAs are isolated in one lab with one supervisor in control of their yearly contract, their hours, and letters of recommendation vital to their career. This strict hierarchy leaves contracted RAs vulnerable to abusive working conditions, evidenced by studies finding higher rates of depression among grads compared to their peers working outside of academia. This is viewed by many as a rite of passage. I have seen this attitude firsthand when a faculty member at a general meeting told a story about how he decided to skip his toddler's birthday at the last minute in order to work more.

The strongest case for collective bargaining rights comes from UMD itself. Many UMD faculty see the inequity happening in academia. Mark Shayman, Associate Dean and ombudsman spoke to a reporter saying, "Sometimes faculty members do things and really there should be a response from the university, and there's not really a place for students to go where they feel they can be heard officially. There's something missing."

The "something missing" is collective bargaining. Please stand against inequity and unfair working conditions in academia by supporting collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

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Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Graduate workers are fundamental to carrying out the purpose of any research university. They are the researchers and teachers that keep the university functioning. In any other context, workers doing this kind of mission-critical work would be considered employees. As such, they deserve the right to organize, so that they may secure workplace protections --- from sexual harassment, abuse, and retribution for raising concerns --- that ensure safe working environments elsewhere. To continually deny this right to a group that is an engine for innovation, intellectual leadership, and economic growth in this state is a severe moral failing.

Sincerely,

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

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

As a PhD candidate in history, my goal has been to explore the countless courageous efforts of everyday people banding together to fight for justice, security, and dignity; to learn the collective strategies that lead to victory; and to extract the lessons from failure.

I have tried to use the lessons this history provides to effect change in my community and on my campus. For the past three and a half years, I have devoted myself to organizing my colleagues to fight for justice, security, and improved working conditions for my fellow graduate workers. As the Student Interest Liaison for the history department I am tasked with acting as a representative to the department on behalf of history graduate students concerning their working conditions; as the chair of the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee, I act as a representative for all graduate workers and communicate our grievances and concerns to the university administration; as a representative to the Graduate Student Government I mobilized graduate students to push for greater protections and services; and as the President of Fearless Student Employees, I help spearhead the continuing legislative effort to pass a state law recognizing our status as employees entitled to national labor protections.

These roles have put me in a unique position to interact with the larger community of graduate students and hear about the struggles they are facing. Graduate workers are overworked, underpaid, and have little legal protections as workers. We lack medical or family leave, we are vulnerability due to our immigration status, we have no assistance for child care, we are at the whims of abusive supervisors, and we face racial, gender, and sexual discrimination. Graduate workers face a massive power imbalance when dealing with their employers and we lack any legal protections or means of redress because in the state of Maryland, graduate workers at public universities lack the rights afforded to other employees.

The situation has become even more dire in the Covid-19 pandemic. Graduate workers have had their workload increase, lost their assistantships, been forced to work in person without proper precautions, while being denied the vaccine because they are not “employees.”

Beyond the immediate concerns of graduate workers, the Covid-19 pandemic has terrifying implications for academia as a whole. In the past, the treatment of graduate workers was justified as a temporary initiation or “apprenticeship” which would guarantee a secure profession within the academy. However, the promise of a faculty position is increasingly becoming out of reach for many graduate students. The majority of those with humanities PhDs do not end up in academia and only a small fraction of those are able to secure a tenured-track position. The situation has become even more dire in the Covid-19 pandemic. Lost revenue, lower enrollments, and new expenditures have led to state budget cuts which have forced many universities to reduce the number of teaching assistantships, cancel grants and fellowships, and

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impose hiring freezes. The full ramifications of this health crisis are still unknown but unless action is taken the result will be an ever-decreasing number of people choosing to pursue graduate degrees and jobs in academia.

The good news is that there is an easy step that will help ameliorate many of these problems: grant graduate workers in Maryland the same rights graduate workers at many public and all private universities already enjoy. The right to collective bargaining would allow us to a seat at the table and force the university to take our needs seriously.

I understand some are concerned about the potential budget implications of this act (especially in light of the pandemic), however, these concerns are unfounded. Collective bargaining is just that: *bargaining*. Just because the university is required to bargain in good faith with us, does not automatically translate into higher salaries for graduate workers. While higher salaries would of course be welcomed, there are a myriad of other benefits that graduate workers is the USM would gain from collective bargaining, that would not impact the budget. Clearer guidelines, contracts, improved grievance procedures, access to the Maryland State Higher Education Labor Relations Board – all of these would do wonders in improving the experience of graduate workers and would cost the state nothing.

Graduate workers are essential workers. Essential during the pandemic, essential to the running of the university system, and essential to a well-functioning society. Graduate students have much to contribute to US policy, economy, culture, and efforts to make a more just society. If we do not foster this kind of knowledge, we are doing our world a disservice. Therefore, I implore you to vote in favor of SB118.

Sincerely,

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President, Fearless Student Employees
Chair, The Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC)
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
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3 East Miller Senate Office Building
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My department has faced strong criticism over the inequity in graduate assistantship assignments. Some graduate students have been given much easier workloads in comparison to others without much transparency of how these assignments were given or additional compensation for those with larger workloads. Furthermore, the hiring freeze brought on by COVID-19 has placed the department in dire straits with regard to professorial labor. There are now fewer full time professors than ever and there is no chance to replace those who have left. This has placed a disproportionate amount of the undergraduate teaching labor on graduate students, who have little say in negotiating their contracts to account for this additional responsibility.

Sincerely,

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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
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3 East Miller Senate Office Building
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

As a graduate student at UMD, I am expected to work, research, and write full time; however, I earn far below a livable wage in the DMV area. Not only are graduate students massively underpaid, but we are also often dependent upon outside work, competitive fellowships, and outside funding just to afford basic living expenses. These additional jobs take away from our ability to do our best and most effective work at UMD - from teaching to researching.

Graduate students are treated as staff when it's financially expedient and we are treated as students when it can save time and hassle. For example, Prince George's County claims anyone working in higher ed in the county is eligible for the covid vaccine in phase 1b; however, when graduate students (who teach undergraduates) arrived for their vaccine, they were denied because they aren't "faculty," they're "students." This is just one example of how graduate students' status is dependent on what's most convenient for the University.

As graduate students, we deserve to advocate for our rights - not to have an administrator far removed from the trials of graduate school decide what's best for us. Graduate students deserve to have the agency to make these choices for ourselves.

Sincerely,

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

As a graduate teaching assistant in the School of Music, I fully support graduate student workers' right to collective bargaining in the state of Maryland. To me, there is absolutely no downside to extending this right to graduate student workers who, as of 2022, are not paid a wage that is liveable or sustainable. When I speak to fellow teaching assistants in my division, I notice many flaws within the system that we currently operate in. Many of us have partners or kids or other extenuating circumstances which are not covered by the current amount that we are paid on either a 9.5 month or 12 month assistantship and most have some form of secondary income on top of our coursework and teaching duties. Housing in College Park is also a massive issue and the expectation to find our own safe and comfortable housing on the current stipend is completely unacceptable when the rent in most areas nearby is hovering around \$2000 a month.

To be more general, I would also note that in many other large universities across the country, the right to collective bargaining is a standard practice. I would actually argue that it is strange and unusual that such large celebrated universities in Maryland do not have this as an option. To me, it ensures safety, health, and fair treatment of graduate student workers. It is also absolutely a factor that a prospective graduate student will consider when choosing a school. How many students are passing up great offers and great opportunities at places like UMD because they fear not being protected?

Recent events and COVID-19 have shown that workers in every field want better for themselves and will not stand for conditions that compromise their mental and physical health. To be frank, I truly believe that if it continues this way, people are just going to take their business and labor elsewhere. I have greatly enjoyed my experience at UMD so far, but I want my classmates and future students to have the right to collective bargaining. I hope that the thoughts and experiences of myself and my colleagues will be taken into consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Henderson
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am a doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant at the University of Maryland. I write to you today to request your support for collective bargaining for graduate students at UMD.

Despite significant contributions to the university, graduate students are often taken advantage of and treated unfairly in the workplace because we lack the collective power to negotiate for fair terms. As a graduate teaching assistant, I interact with up to 200 students per semester; these duties include teaching in my own classroom, holding office hours, grading homeworks, assignments, and exams, and contributing to lesson plans and testing instruments. As a senior TA, I also help manage a team of seven other teaching assistants. During this pandemic, the duties of graduate teaching assistants have expanded to include assisting professors with technology platforms (e.g. Zoom), developing online curriculums, and providing both instrumental and emotional support to our students: all responsibilities which should fall on the course instructor, who is compensated for our additional work. An education at UMD would be severely lacking without the expertise of graduate students.

Regardless of how our responsibilities increase, we are unable to negotiate an increase in pay or benefits. There have also been several occasions (experienced by myself and others) where our departments have verbally miscommunicated information about pay and benefits to graduate students, and expected us to continue our teaching responsibilities without clear terms. Teaching without written contracts means that our financial circumstances depends solely on the trust between a department and its students: a trust which has been violated several times in the past. There are no repercussions for these actions because graduate students have little to no power without a faculty member that sympathizes with them.

With the passing of collective bargaining for graduate students, the Maryland legislature has the power to change the circumstances of thousands of graduate students. This right will improve working conditions for graduate students at the University of Maryland, and show that the state does value our significant contributions to the state university system.

Sincerely,

Amanda E. Ng, MPH

PhD Student, Department of Epidemiology

Graduate Teaching Assistant

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I'm writing in support of SB 118 and granting collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants in the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. As an employee, student, and former graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, I can testify that graduate assistants perform work that is necessary for a functioning university, and that enjoining them to perform this work without the right to collectively bargain is exploitative.

University administrators like to say that graduate assistants are “students first,” even writing such language into the Graduate School’s assistantship policies. The “students first” approach has not served to protect graduate assistants’ welfare and ability to balance earning wages with completing degree requirements, as administrators may claim, or is it intended to. Instead, it effectively denies an entire class of workers, who are also students, the rights they should be accorded as workers.

A note about what graduate assistants do: Many teach multiple course sections of undergraduate and graduate students, including large general education and core or introductory courses. Often the first instructors and advisors students encounter at the College Park campus are graduate student workers. Graduate assistants conduct the research on which faculty members depend for their own advancement, often taking on hands-on and/or repetitive tasks that faculty members and staff will not do. Graduate student workers keep labs and studies running while faculty members devote time to pursuing grants and other external funding on which the university bases its research enterprise. Graduate assistants also fill crucial administrative roles, working as academic advisors to large numbers of fellow students, or developing and running programs at the many centers on campus – such as the LGBT Equity Center and Multicultural Student Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) at the Stamp Student Union. Often the first mentorship students enjoy at the College Park campus comes to them through the persons or labor of graduate student workers.

I work in the University Libraries on the College Park campus, and have previously submitted testimony to the Assembly about how graduate assistants do all of the above work and more in the Libraries. Many core library functions depend on the labor of graduate assistants. These include teaching, metadata management, user research and usability, processing archival collections, outreach, and maintaining digital systems. Graduate assistants are involved in every

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program and resource with which the Libraries cultivate community and knowledge sharing. Nearly everything a librarian does here, a graduate assistant also does.

The university would collapse were graduate assistants to withhold their labor. University administrators across Maryland have long resisted collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants out of fear, using duplicitous and divisive means. It's time for the General Assembly to hold these state institutions to account. **Graduate student workers are workers.**

Sincerely,

Amy Wickner

Ph.D. Candidate, iSchool

Electronic Records Archivist (2017-), Digital Projects Graduate Assistant (2014-2017),

University of Maryland Libraries

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As a graduate research assistant in College Park, I find that passing SB118 is essential to the wellbeing of graduate workers across all campuses in the USM.

As a student in the Electrical & Computer Engineering department, I have above average funding, and my advisor allows me to have a good work-life balance. However, even with my current stipend it is difficult to afford living in the DC area. Those with average or below average stipends can find it nearly impossible. This problem only gets worse each year, as the approximately 1% annual cost-of-living increases do not keep up with rent increases, not to mention the increases in other costs. Regardless, stipend and work-life balance are highly dependent on my department, advisor, and campus of study. On an individual level, no graduate student can petition for improvements in their working conditions, especially when such issues vary wildly between departments and campuses. Such improvements can only be attained through collective bargaining.

Of course, even if graduate students decide not to unionize, we should have the ability to decide that for ourselves. We are workers and keep the wheel of academia turning through our research and teaching, and as such should have the freedom to bargain for our rights if we so choose. SB118 is a necessary step to having that freedom, and I sincerely hope that the bill is passed.

Sincerely,

Andrew Goffin
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I think, graduate assistants are the backbone of the University academic system. They have many prescribed and subtle duties. They are morally, physically and mentally committed to the academic system. I think, depending on their work, the payment they are getting is not really appreciable. I hereby, support this petition that GAs should get appreciable amount of money to get financial satisfaction to get their job done efficiently.

Sincerely,

Anmol
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
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SB 118
Supporting

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

I am submitting this testimony in support of the efforts of the graduate assistants at the University of Maryland to achieve collective bargaining rights.

I have had a 45-year career as a trade unionist: a rank and file member, an elected leader and a staff member in multiple positions and with various unions. I know from personal experience that there is nothing that provides more respect and dignity and protection on the job to working people than collective bargaining. One of my unions, the United Auto Workers, represented graduate student-employees at campuses across the nation. The experience of union membership made their members better able to serve their universities and their students.

Collective bargaining turns a chaotic situation for graduate assistants into a prescribed, livable, predictable and just student-employee experience. The result is a more effective corps of teachers, researchers and workers.

Sincerely,

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I have been a Graduate Assistant for 2 years. I have greatly enjoyed my experience as a GA and have been thankful for the boss I have had in my position for being empathetic and meeting the expectations of our work agreements. However, I know that not all GAs are as lucky as I have been and that the graduate student worker position on campus can be fraught with power inequities. I am here to speak up and speak out against UMD's exploitation of student workers. I am here to speak up for our rights as graduate student workers.

Sincerely,

Anne Richardson
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
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3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I think graduate assistants are underpaid in a way that they have large burden of works but still not enough resources to live a good life. Therefore, an increase in payscale would help the graduate assistants improve their quality of life and hence their academic performance.

Sincerely,

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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SB 118

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3 East Miller Senate Office Building

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

I am a PhD candidate in University of Maryland, doing research in Quantum Optics, and also an international student from Greece.

First of all, the proposed bill will allow graduate students to collectively bargain if they choose to do so, possibly starting by forming a union. This is not an end-goals in itself; it is the suggestions it will put forward that justify its existence. And talking about suggestions and needs...

I've heard previously that I should primarily think of myself as a student working towards their dissertation, instead of as a worker meriting compensation for all hours of work. Our labs receive millions of funding to develop solutions and prototypes by doing very real work. Commonly, our professors rely on graduate students and post-docs to operate these labs. Yet, our love for science and the fact that we DO acquire a lot of knowledge during our PhDs have been distorted into a "students-and-not-workers" label by the Dean of the Graduate School in a previous hearing for the bill. This label allows the university to pay stipends averaging \$20k/year.

In any case, I get paid "like a student", but I cannot pay rent or eat "like a student". We also heard that a certain survey showed that the living cost in Maryland does not exceed roughly \$20k/year. I AGREE with this statement. In fact, it's hard to miss how literal it is. One will live with \$20k/year; they will not die – excluding emergencies. If the assumption here is that graduate students do not deserve to satisfy every single one of a list of needs like a healthy diet AND decent housing AND leisure activities AND financial protection from medical emergencies – and all of this in one of the most expensive areas in the United States – then I am unpleasantly surprised by this assumption.

Moving on, to working conditions and advisor-advisee relationships, UMD does have grievance mechanisms in place. Grievance mechanisms that can really only address isolated incidents of guideline violation. When it comes to issues like work hours, vacation days, or even participation to science outreach events, then University guidelines are overlooked widely and wildly.

Especially international students feel pressured to follow all of their advisor professor's requirements, since their legal status in the country is tied to their degree. An advisor professor holds an enormous amount of power over the student and their relationship determines the student's later career. A certain professor was as respectful as to say, "I tend to ignore emails about these statements of mutual expectations" (which is a recently earned right for graduate students. Who will risk pushing back? By the way, I believe that this answers another one of Dean Fetter's concerns, that a union could be an intermediary complicating the mentor-mentee

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relationship: it is an advisor not tending to the needs and realities of their advisees that complicates this relationship.

Let me conclude by saying: UMD graduate assistants are facing issues that are known and unaddressed. This means that the only ones who can advocate for them are themselves, and the right to collective bargaining serves exactly that necessity. We are not asking for the right to advocate for unfairly high salaries, laziness or disruption – we are just stating that not having collective bargaining rights undermines the work we are doing, challenges any reasonable line of thought and compromises our dignity. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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

I support this collective bargaining rights because the cost of living continues to go up in the DMV area. This is not seen to be reflected in our teaching assistantships/graduate funding package in terms of what our stipend is. Also when you think about BIPOC having to be overworked because they look towards other means of income it is not right and could ultimately affect their academic success in graduate school because they have financial stressors that they're white colleagues may not have.

Sincerely,

Ari Perez
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Supporting

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

Together with President Pines and others I celebrate the high position our university (joint with UMB) achieved in the research spending rating. However, it's striking for me that Graduate Assistants in the same university earn so little compared to other GA's nationwide. According to GAAC, we have a 5000\$ cost of living deficit. I am on my first year, and I dread my first summer. I'm not allowed to search for additional funding because of comprehensive examinations. I doubt that COVID situation will be good enough for me to return home. I don't think I will be able to save enough money from my current stipend, and my visa doesn't allow me to work besides my TA-ship. My parents are not poor, but they live in another country, and their wages are below poverty threshold when translated to USD. I came to the US with the hope that I can survive on my own, but I don't see much opportunities as of now. I believe collective bargaining will allow me and other Graduate Assistants to get out of such dead-end situations and find a solution together with our university.

Sincerely,

Arseniy Braslavskiy
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
4326 Rowalt Drive, College Park, MD 20740
abraslav@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Collective bargaining rights are crucial because of the power dynamics between professors and graduate students. Graduate students, especially those pursuing phds or international students, are dependent on their professors for essentially the continuation of their careers. Funding, employment, career opportunities, visas are all funneled through their research advisor. However, if this arrangement becomes abusive, there are no options for graduate students. There is an immediate fear of retribution, of having absolutely no power over the course of one's life other than to forfeit all of the work they've done or to continue suffering the abuse. Collective Bargaining is necessary to give graduate students rights. This is not a serfdom. Graduate students doing work for their professors is a mutually beneficial agreement, and collective bargaining is necessary for this to be formally recognized.

Sincerely,

Astha Singhal
Graduate Student, CMNS
University of Maryland, College Park
8150 Baltimore Avenue, College Park, MD 20740
asinghal084@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I believe graduate students should have the right for collective bargaining. It ensures a healthy job environment and basic rights for the graduate students. Amidst the global pandemic COVID-19, many of us are struggling with their life both physically and mentally. Proper care should be given in order to address them. That's why I support this collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

Atiqur Rahman
Graduate Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The University of Maryland at College Park has one of the lowest cost of living to graduate stipend ratios among similar institutions in the United States. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a living wage in Baltimore, MD is \$15. 81 per hour. This means graduate students at the University of Maryland currently earn between ten and fifteen thousand dollars below a living wage. As an institution located in the Washington, DC metro area, rent and other living costs are difficult to afford for students while maintaining a healthy quality of life that includes access to fresh food, medical care, and being able to cover basic expenses without constant stress. My partner and I live in Baltimore city. I am a graduate research assistant at UMD College Park and work part time in retail to make ends meet. He is a student at UMBC and teaches computer programming classes through UMBC Training Centers for work. We live in a one bedroom apartment and pay \$900 per month between the two of us for rent. We spend roughly \$125 per week on food for the two of us and rarely eat out. We keep our phone, car, and insurance payments as low as we can. It is still virtually impossible to save enough money to cover something like an unexpected medical expense or car repair. The graduate students at the University of Maryland need collective bargaining rights so that they can effectively advocate for stipends that are livable and just. The state higher education institutions of Maryland have the opportunity to set an example of what it means to pay graduate students fairly instead of perpetuating an abusive system that keeps graduate students barely able to keep their head above water financially. Graduate students already hold degrees. We are trained professionals doing valuable research and work in our fields that benefits our state's economy, environment, and well-being. The graduate assistants at the University of Maryland need to help of the legislature to win our right to bargain for our needs instead of being disregarded students who are not part of our state's prosperity. We are Maryland's future success and progress. We should be able to pay our bills.

Sincerely,

Aubrey Tingler
Research Assistant, Department of Environmental Science and Technology
University of Maryland, College Park
2504 N Calvert St Apt 1, Baltimore, MD 21218
atingler@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of collective bargaining rights for graduate employees, and I strongly urge you to pass SB 118. As a faculty member at the University of Maryland, College Park I watch graduate student workers teach courses that are integral to the functioning of our department. Graduate student workers often teach courses on their own and are responsible for all aspects of being the instructor of record in addition to their coursework and research. Compared to the faculty who teach these courses they are not being adequately compensated for the work that they do. GAs are denied the right to bargain for salary increases even though many of them do the same work as lecturers on campus, who are considered university employees. Without the GAs in our department we would not be able to offer the number of classes we do and our undergraduate degree program would not be able to function.

Additionally, student workers need collective bargaining rights in order to be protected from exploitation in the workplace and to bargain for needed benefits. Many graduate student workers are unfairly asked to work more hours than their stated contract, which impacts their academic progress, yet they do not have the recourse of union protection. Their work benefits the university at the expense of their own studies. Graduate student workers help make the university run and deserve representation when their labor is fundamental to our ability to offer courses to undergraduates. GAs should not have to live in precarious positions, without access to needed benefits, and without the rights to bargain for these benefits when they are workers who provide the education that students pay for at the University of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Bayley J. Marquez, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of American Studies

7508 Garrison Road

Hyattsville, MD 20784

baylopez14@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate workers are critical to any research organization/university. They deserve the right to organize and demand for better working conditions and bargain compensations and benefits.

Sincerely,

Bharat Prakash
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
1812 N Calvert St, Baltimore, Maryland 21202
bhp1@umbc.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

UMD has one of the lowest paying grad schools located in a college town with a very high cost of living. With the current RA salary from my department, a grad student can only afford sub-standard housing with living conditions detrimental to their physical and mental health. Thus, I believe the right to collective bargaining is crucial for grad students to lead a healthy lifestyle which could positively affect their productivity.

Sincerely,

Bhargav Sai Chava
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
3426 Tulane drive, Hyattsville, Maryland 20783
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate assistants are not paid a living wage. Most of us are working over 40 hours a week if you combine the time we are in our own classes, teaching/working, meeting with students, grading, and studying/researching. Most of my peers spend a majority of their stipend on rent with little additional leftover for other living costs. This is unfair and dangerous considering the baseline stresses associated with graduate school. We should be able to feel comfortable and safe. Unionizing will allow us to lobby for increased wages.

Sincerely,

Bianca Licitra
Graduate Assistant, English
University of Maryland, College Park
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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Supporting

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

I am writing in support of SB118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. I am a PhD candidate in History at the University of Maryland, College Park. During my time here at the university, there have been numerous efforts at trying to try to gain collective bargaining rights for graduate students. I have supported each of these efforts because it is my fundamental belief that workers have the right to organize their workplace to improve their conditions. Graduate students, in addition to being students, are workers. We teach classes, run labs, grade assignments, staff administrative positions, and maintain our library and archival services. Graduate student-workers are often the most forward-facing contacts that students, staff, professors, and visitors have when they are at UMD. Because of the vital role played by graduate student workers, we should have the right to organize and collectively bargain as workers.

When discussing collective bargaining and potential unionization, the focus is often on wages and compensation, but for many, the issue is less with pay than with our working conditions. Collective bargaining would provide an opportunity to create a more equitable and open work environment. For graduate student workers, often their conditions are the product of a vague and ad-hoc set of traditions determined by individual professors or administrators. Even with the introduction of statements of mutual expectations, there are still unresolved problems with respect to their enforcement or if the student-worker has a dispute. Graduate student workers are often placed in a delicate situation where their boss is often an adviser or committee member. This means in a dispute they run the risk of damaging their academic career prospects. They would further have to rely on the broader academic department which may or not choose to advocate for a student over a colleague. Collective bargaining would not end disputes, but it would allow for more formalized means of redress.

In addition to providing a more equitable means of resolving work disputes, collective bargaining would also offer an opportunity to create a more coherent system of compensation. Even beyond disparities between different colleges and fields, within departments there is a lot of opacity and inconsistency regarding compensation for performing the same jobs.

Collective bargaining would also offer other opportunities for graduate student workers to be classified as workers, and not students. Though this shift would feature some drawbacks, overall, the benefits would outweigh the costs. One obvious benefit is that as employees, students would have access to the protections offered through law for workers who become pregnant and need access to family leave. Right now, they are left out of such protections. There are other benefits that would come through being classified as workers, even things like payroll taxes which would incorporate graduate student workers into the welfare system.

Collective bargaining is the right of every worker. It is a practice that exists at our peer institutions in the Big Ten as well as other universities in neighboring states. In a climate in

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which all workers are being subjected to greater pressure to perform in difficult circumstances, collective bargaining is a necessary tool to ensure that we are protected from exploitation.

Brian R Sarginger
PhD Candidate, History Department
Teaching Assistant Hist 134
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The United States has the most impressive model for scientific advancement in the world. The work is done by droves of brilliant people - graduate students. We pay them next to nothing. That's part of what keeps innovation cost effective. However, given the tremendous contribution graduate students make, all of them should at least be able to make enough money to get their basic needs met. I spend 74% of my take-home pay on rent. Graduate students aren't asking for fortunes, but they should be able to afford to eat.

This is not a Covid-19 related issue, but if the current pandemic helps amplify our voice for equitable compensation, use it.

Sincerely,

Brian Scott
Graduate Assistant, ENST
University of Maryland, College Park
4327 Clagett Road, University Park, Maryland 20782
bscott33@umd.edu

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of SB 118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. Last semester, I had the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant for the first time. I am very passionate about education and I'm glad I had the opportunity to share ideas and knowledge with inquisitive students. However, this experience greatly strengthened my belief that graduate students have earned the right to collectively bargain for adequate compensation and benefits. While the work of a graduate assistant is very intellectually and emotionally rewarding, the increasing cost of living in the state of Maryland and the declining job prospects throughout academia (and the labor market as a whole) have left many students in a very vulnerable economic position. Unfortunately, a passion for education cannot pay bills. The financial benefits provided by graduate assistantships are not commensurate with the time commitment and effort that these jobs require. Therefore, graduate student should be granted the right to negotiate for compensation that is proportional to the value of our work.

It is easy to imagine – as I did before I became a teaching assistant – that graduate assistantships are simply “a part of our training” and are mutually beneficial to the student and the university. However, I've come to realize that many graduate assistants are in a position where they must actively sacrifice their academic progress to fulfill the requirements of their assistantships. It is not unusual for teaching assistants to spend hours crafting lessons, familiarizing themselves with course materials, grading assignments, and answering questions from students. In some cases, teaching assistants are effectively asked to design entire courses – picking readings, establishing assignments and grading scales, etc. It is not unusual for students to write in our anonymous course feedback surveys that they learned as much or more from a teaching assistant as they did from the professor. I say this not to denigrate professors (they delegate these teaching responsibilities in order to free up time for important research), but to emphasize the fact that the work graduate students do is essential to the functioning of the university.

Considering the significance of the work we do, I believe that graduate students should be granted the right to collectively bargain like other university and state employees. I hope you will consider my testimony and others as you deliberate on this issue. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brice Bowrey

PhD, Department of History, UMCP

Teaching Assistant

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

20 Ridge Rd., Unit B
Greenbelt, MD 20770
blbowrey@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a graduate student and research assistant in the School of Public Policy at UMD. I would like to urge you to support SB 118. Graduate student assistants often put in far more than the 20 hours per week we are compensated for, contributing to the advancement of research, education of students, and well-being of society. We deserve the right to collectively bargain, to be treated as employees, and to be able to air grievances to the Higher Education Relations Board.

Sincerely,

Brinda Yarlagadda
Research Assistant
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

What the legislature must decide now is whether it will recognize the rights of workers who happen to be university students in the manner that it recognizes the rights of all other public and private sector workers. The State should follow the same legal standards with respect to its own employees that it requires of all other employers within the state. This means accepting an obligation to bargain with a union if student workers choose to organize one.

Sincerely,

BRUCE LEVINE
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I have worked as a graduate student assistant at both the University of Maryland and the University of Wisconsin. My pay from both institutions was about the same, but the cost of living in the DC metro area is dramatically higher than it is in Wisconsin. The right to collectively bargain is an important tool to ensure graduate assistants receive appropriate compensation for their labor and, most significantly, a living wage.

Sincerely,

Carter Reitman
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of SB118 the work of teaching and research assistants makes the University of Maryland a top institution of higher learning and ensures that students achieve positive learning outcomes. Nevertheless, 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, particularly in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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. I also take on outside work whenever possible to make ends meet. These deficiencies have been exacerbated by the move to online learning, which has required us to learn new technologies and teaching strategies and keep track of a litany of students' illnesses and life complications.

Before I entered UMD, I worked in two different jobs covered by collective bargaining agreements. These are not radical documents. Rather, they establish rule of law and predictable conditions and outcomes in the workplace. 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 and safety in the workplace, it is shameful that the University of Maryland system would disregard potential issues in the workplace and 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 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

Teaching Assistant and Doctoral Candidate, History

1151 West Cross St.

Baltimore, MD 21230

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a first-year student pursuing my MFA in Studio Art at the University of Maryland, College Park. I support this campaign because as both contracted workers and full time students, we deserve collective bargaining rights to insure fair and safe treatment in the workplace, negotiation for contracts and stipends, and the right to fight for other benefits and protections as a recognized labor organization.

In the history of student labor organizing, many colleges and university administrations have fought student worker's unions on the basis that students are students, and thus their primary function is to learn, not to work. Yet though we are students, we are also workers and employees of the state of Maryland. For many of us, our stipends and assistantships are our sole income to support ourselves and often to help support our households or family members.

The ability to bargain collectively would grant me and my fellow student-workers greater security in our jobs. I know I would have greater confidence in negotiating my contract and expressing my desire in the areas of conditions, salary, and job protections. I would feel less fear of reprimand or dismissal from my program if I knew my contract was equitably bargained for and not just the matter of internal and administrative decision making. I would love to understand with transparency how state funds are distributed to GAs and other graduate workers. As a state worker of Maryland, I want to be able to collectively bargain for my rights with my peers and unionize should we choose to do so.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I moved to Maryland to begin grad school. My partner who relocated with me struggled with their job placement in the healthcare field (due to medical scribes being used less in clinical settings during the pandemic), and they were out of work for several months due to this underemployment. During this time, I was in my first semester ever of TA-ing at UMD. I didn't really know my rights as a Graduate Assistant or feel a sense of community with other graduate workers. I paid for all of my household's expenses this fall with my GA salary, which barely covered it—if I did not have even the slight financial safety net that I am lucky to have, I would have had to find other employment to supplement my salary, which would have strongly impeded my success in the MFA program. With collective bargaining in place, I would have had more resources and community to draw on when I struggled, as well as an awareness of options for advocating for more COVID-19 financial protections or an increased salary with the broader graduate student worker community.

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Sincerely,

Charlotte Rachel Richardson-Deppe
Graduate Assistant, Department of Art
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5546 Karen Elaine Drive #1415, New Carrollton, MD 20784
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

As a graduate student employee working 20 hours per week and attending class full-time, my dedication to the University of Maryland-College Park is self-evident. As a communications assistant in a large College on campus, I produce content accessible to students, alumni, researchers and other professionals. Essentially, I act as a community liaison and play a part in setting the public image of the University.

I am dedicated to both my studies and work on campus, and aspire for the University to succeed on a national and international platform. However, whether the University treats graduate student employees with similar respect can at times seem tenuous.

If the University of Maryland-College Park were as fearless as it claims, the right for students to collectively bargain would be a nonissue. Other universities that have such rights boast graduate students who feel backed and heard by their university, making for great success in graduate school. Moreover, much of that graduate student success is a reflection of the university, which benefits similarly in promotion and research dollars .

If the University of Maryland-College Park wishes to position itself as a premier research and higher education institution in the Big 10, then the University must accept the responsibility of maintaining a professional relationship with graduate student employees. Simply allowing the right to collectively bargain, if students so choose, as dictated in MD SB118, seems incremental progress in a forward-thinking direction in this regard. Thanks to the Committee for consideration of MD SB118.

Sincerely,

Chris Samoray

Masters, Plant Science & Landscape Architecture

Graduate Assistant

2139 Plant Sciences Building, 4291 Fieldhouse Drive, College Park, MD 20742

ATTN: Chris Samoray

samorayc@gmail.com

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

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Supporting

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

We are paid for 20 hours of work per week. If this was actually a part time job, we might be able to get a second job to reach a livable annual wage. However, the 20 hour work week is a lie, and no PI, at least in my department, would allow a student to work so little. When I signed on to work with my advisor, he told me 60 hours per week was minimum to be a successful PhD student.

In my first year of graduate school, I worked an average 80 hour week. Sometimes it got up to 100 hours per week with coursework and my RA. In this situation I would often sleep on campus because my hour commute was precious time I couldn't afford to waste. In my second year I made a bed in the closet of my office; in my third year I lived out of my office for about a month. Even now, in my fifth year of graduate school, I have a box with a sleeping bag and pillow inside it just in case the need arises.

I operate million dollar pieces of equipment in my lab. I work with temperatures colder than the deepest darkest part of space. This is skilled labor. If I were paid minimum wage for even 40 hours per week instead of 20--a standard work week!--my life would improve and I might not be so constantly stressed. Yet, because I am a "student" (who no longer takes courses) instead of an "employee", I have no rights to even try to improve my situation.

I am in graduate school because I love physics and want to be a physicist. I am going to continue to the end because this is the only way for me to accomplish my dream. This is true for so many of us: and the professors and department know we have no other choice but to do what they ask, or give up what we want our futures to be. They take the passion of students and leverage it to eek out as much value as they can from us, and it results in an abysmal quality of life for the time we are here. Please help us.

Sincerely,

Christie Trimble
Research Assistant, Department of Physics
University of Maryland, College Park
5401 McGrath Blvd , Rockville, MD 20852

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

If there has ever been a time to do what it right, this is it. We are in a significant economic, social, and public health crisis, but we are also in a key moment for meaningful political change. Passing Senate Bill 118 is but one crucial step to help protect workers' rights and invest in the lives of all who live, work, and learn in the state of Maryland.

I am writing to express my strongest of the right of graduate student workers to collectively bargain, and I see that as a win for the state of Maryland and for higher education. Graduate student employees at the University of Maryland provide crucial, extensive, and diverse labor in the form of research, teaching, and administrative tasks that are all essential to the operation of this university. The State of Maryland has already recognized the right of other workers at our state university to collectively bargain. The exclusion of workers who are also graduate students is unacceptable and should be immediately corrected. The right to collectively bargain is now an established right of graduate student workers in states that are home to the country's top-ranking public research universities – such California, Michigan, Illinois, Washington, and New Jersey. These universities include existing and aspirational peer institutions for the University of Maryland, as well as fellow members of the Big Ten. They also join many other states, such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Iowa, Oregon, and our neighboring state of Delaware in recognizing this important right. Leading private universities such as Columbia University and New York University also recognize this shared right of all private and public sector workers. At these universities, it has been shown that a recognized work force benefits not only workers but also the educational experience of its students and the status of its research record. I served for five years as Director of Graduate Studies in my department, and we lost many of our top recruits to our program in favor of those at the University of California, University of Michigan, Rutgers University, and New York University in large part due to the kind of support these schools offer to an organized and recognized graduate student work force. There is no contradiction that graduate students are both students and workers, in this case at the same institution; the contradiction is only that the latter status is denied, eroding the integrity of the university itself.

If the University of Maryland wants to maintain and improve its status among the ranks of the best universities in this country, it is imperative that it, too, recognize all of its workers. Moreover, this public health crisis has made it even more visible how important it is that all

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workers have the right to be active participants in shaping the conditions of their labor. It is crucial that states like Maryland stand up and reiterate their long-standing support for all of the people who live and work there, and to provide a strong, forward-thinking model that will continue to demonstrate Maryland's status as a leader.

Sincerely,

Christina Hanhardt

Associate Professor, Department of American Studies (for identification purposes only)

University of Maryland, College Park

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

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Supporting

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

Graduate workers at many public and all private universities already have the right to unionize. Furthermore, our bill says nothing about grads having to unionize or what any units would look like. All we want to do is remove the language that specifically denies our status as employees and allow grads at each university in Maryland the right to choose for themselves if a union is right for them.

Sincerely,

Christopher Williams
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
UMD SPH 4200 Valley Drive, College Park, MD 20742
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
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SB 118
Supporting

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

I am now a GA at UMD. I recognize the hard effort that UMD is helping with international student like me. Due to COVID, our life has been tough. The price is going up right now, due to inflation. We need GA to support our life and academics.

Sincerely,

Chung-Hao Lee
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Unionization is the most powerful way for workers to protect themselves from more powerful institutions. It is, quite frankly, insulting that we as graduate students must fight this hard simply to obtain the ability to collectively bargain. As a result of this, our pay is significantly below what would be expected, given living expenses in the area. I am forced to live at home in Baltimore and commute to avoid the exorbitant cost of living near College Park. Beyond this, we graduate students are limited in the ability to find work outside of our duties as teaching or research assistants, given both the restrictive language given in our employment contracts and the long hours required to work and attend class not allowing much time for work extracurricular work anyway. It is our right as workers to come together and improve our working conditions by collectively flexing our strength in the only way we can: through unionization.

As a result of the COVID pandemic and related staff shortages, my work as a lab TA places a much larger burden on me than prior to the pandemic. We are working with students who have missed significant in-person lab time, which has resulted in then missing significant lab skills which they otherwise would have had. As a result, I am forced to hold a greater degree of responsibility, and pay more attention in order to ensure safety in the lab. Additionally, the preparation for the lab is often incomplete, requiring me to scramble to grab chemicals from the stock room in the few minutes between me arriving to lab and the students beginning the experiment. Despite this increase in responsibilities, there has been no corresponding increase in compensation. Collective bargaining would allow us as graduate students to take advantage of the University's heavy reliance on underpaid labor to fight for better working conditions.

Sincerely,

Collin John Vincent
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining rights because the current administration's practices for determining our cost of living are ignorantly inaccurate at best and intentionally skewed to depress wages below livable conditions at worst. While I'd like to give them the benefit of the doubt, I am too hungry to do so. Many of our graduate students rely on mutual aid, food pantries, and a 2nd or 3rd job on top of their coursework and GA work to survive. We're living in moldy basements and apartments full of bedbugs. We're working longer hours than our contracts allow with absolutely no recourse available. I currently work an additional 25 hours per week outside of my GA contract, while attempting to take 4 courses and work on my own research. We're on a fast track to burning out the 'best and brightest' that the university both brags about and depends on. The current system is unsustainable, and the strategy of throwing spare nickels at us when other universities start to strike can only last so long.

Sincerely,

Connie Siebold
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing in support of SB 658 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act.

We, graduate students, deserve the right to organize as any other employees and this should be enough, but it hasn't been in the past many years and I will try to follow with some arguments that we should take into account.

Graduate students are an incredible high skilled work force in this country, making universities work the way they do. However, grad students recognition is below anything that I've experienced.

We do not have fixed work hours, we are supposed to work whenever our adviser tells us to, none of the extra hours or night shifts are paid because we live in the false pretense that science should be a work for the ones that really want this in their lives, despite having no reassurance that this will be our future (because no matter how hard we work, a position as a professor or a tenure are never guaranteed). And yet we are the work force that gives prestige and recognition to our University.

In our duties we are supposed to teach, to run experiments in the lab, to write papers and in the meantime advance with our dissertation - our own project. But the conditions we have when we start grad school are far from optimal and I start with the most striking one.

Our payment.

We have to choose to live in houses that are not friendly to a working environment just because it is cheaper, or just because we want to have a car and need that money for car insurance or because we have student debt that needs to be paid. We have to lose ourselves in financial adjustments and to figure out how many meals out we can have because the money might not be enough until the end of the month. Why don't we cook it ourselves? We wish we could do it all the time but unfortunately the late nights at work sometimes do not allow the time to do it. We often live in decrepit houses just to have enough money to travel somewhere at a certain time of the year. And talking about traveling, we often do not have any vacation stipulated in our rights. This is something that we have to manage with our adviser under no contract or vacations days. and When we do, we are often bound to money constraints because we can't even rent a car for a full week.

I am an international student which means that I like to go see my family at least once a year, but in the first 3 years here, those visits could only happen if and only my family paid for my trip because I couldn't save enough money.

These are the struggles of being a grad student and I am afraid that this is a burden that is too big

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to carry for many of us. The negative view surrounding Grad School is dire, and often perceived as a terrible choice in life, instead of being something to be proud of, something to be grateful that we can do our work in an intellectual environment of learning and growth.

We deserve to be heard, we deserve to have our rights in contracts that protects us from our superiors and more than that, we deserve to be paid accordingly to the work that we do.

We deserve the right to organize, so that we could secure workplace protections in all forms : from sexual harassment, abuse, and retribution for raising concerns --- that ensure safe working environments.

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Graduate students are essential workers. Over the past year, we have lionized the essential workers that make our society function: the grocery store clerks, the delivery people, the frontline health care workers. Although graduate students may not be as essential as these workers during a pandemic, they are essential to the enterprise of the contemporary research university. Indeed, if we see the educational opportunities provided by the University of Maryland as essential to the future success of the state, then we must see the success of graduate students as integral to that success. Graduate students teach tens of thousands of students each semester. They support the research endeavors of faculty, often while pursuing independent research projects of their own. They are both “essential” and “workers,” and thus should have collective bargaining rights like any other worker.

In an ideal world, no worker would need the right to collective bargaining. Everyone who labored on behalf of an institution would be fairly compensated for their work. It goes without saying that we are not living in an ideal world. The University of Maryland, like institutions of higher education across the United States, has been steadily starved of state resources, making it difficult to keep compensation commensurate with our peers and our location, which has seen an obscene surge in rent over the last 20 years. In the absence of adequate stipends and cost of living increases, graduate students are seeking the right to have collective bargaining rights so that they might collectively organize to improve their working conditions. Like most other workers, they should have that right.

It is simply untenable to categorize graduate student workers as workers sometimes, and students other times. They are graduate student workers. We must acknowledge their identities as students, learning a craft, but also as workers, doing the craft. While graduate studies have long been seen as a kind of apprenticeship, we ought not be asking students to live the life of a medieval apprentice. We ought to be thinking of ways to improve their working and living conditions. A good start would be to give them the collective bargaining rights that so many other workers in other industries have.

Sincerely,

Damien Smith Pfister

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write to support SB 118 in the strongest possible terms. My testimony comes from both my expertise as a scholar of workforce development and from my personal experience. I am a former graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, now a faculty member. During my PhD, I worked as a teaching assistant, instructor of record, administrative assistant, and research assistant. After my PhD, I worked in a corporate research lab at Microsoft. Now, I am a faculty member in the fast-growing and highly innovative College of Information Studies, supervising both teaching and research assistants. I love this University, but it will lag behind its R1 peers in places like Berkeley, Michigan, and Washington as long as it undervalues its graduate assistants.

My graduate studies were impeded by rules that changed from work context to work context. Each supervisor had different rules for starting and stopping work. One supervisor's paperwork mistakes resulted in a late paycheck that nearly caused me to cancel my wedding. Others have had it much worse, particularly international students who cannot pursue off-campus work and, because of their visa, have no bargaining power with respect to their lab leader. That supervisor can request whatever hours or duties they want, and there is no legally-binding space for negotiation. Collective bargaining would establish a set of ground rules and a transparent, enforceable system for dispute wherein both sides are valued equally.

My commitment to graduate unionization has only strengthened as a faculty member supervising graduate assistants. I cannot teach a class or run a lab without their work, and I wish there was one set of ground rules that governed that work. Their work in teaching is undeniable: PhD students are regularly instructors of record, or TA's with their own sections. Research assistants' work may seem fuzzier, but the opposite is true. Our labs cannot run without our research assistants. My RA's are not working on their "own" research; they are working on my research, on tasks that I instruct them to complete, with deadlines I set for them. This is a supervisory relationship that only sometimes correlates with an advisory relationship (e.g., in any given semester we are often looking for RA's to just complete a task, and we will not serve on their PhD committees). Any supervisor should be a good mentor, but that is true of any work context—whether it's a lab or a restaurant or a factory.

I wish for a collectively-bargained contract to govern these relationships. In supervision, I want a set of ground rules that everyone is clear on and which can be enforced by a third party. In advising, I want my students to have recourse to legally-binding enforcement so that a mistake

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from me or my peers will not hurt their careers in the long-term. Those ground rules would make my job easier and would allow me to focus on my real job: Research and teaching.

I also want a collectively-bargained contract for my graduate students because it will strengthen recruitment of their future peers. The Colleges with which mine competes for PhD students are largely unionized R1 universities: UCLA, Berkeley, U Michigan, Illinois, Cornell, and Washington. Graduate school is a significant commitment. The security that a contract offers—and the ability to bargain for matters of compensation and work duties—is a competitive advantage that those schools have and which we lack. State policy creates a work environment that prevents me from recruiting top-tier graduate students.

Finally, and precisely because many of these schools have been unionized for decades, we don't have to guess as to whether graduate unionization harms student-faculty relations. It's a well-studied question. In their classic 2013 study "Effects of Unionization on Graduate Student Employees" in the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Rogers, Eaton & Voss surveyed graduate students at four unionized and non-union R1 universities. They found that unionization has no negative effects on graduate student career outcomes or perceptions of academic freedom, and in some cases has a positive effect. Further, "unionized students were more likely than nonunionized students to report respect for differing opinions in their university" and unionized graduate students were more likely to agree that their advisors accepted them as competent professionals, that their advisors were effective in their role, and that their advisors were role models whom they wanted to model their careers on.

The facts are clear: The advising relationship is not harmed by unionization, if anything it is improved by it. Our values are clear: Graduate assistants make this university work, and they deserve a say in it. And my own position as a supervisor and advisor is clear: Graduate unionization would foster a consistent work environment that allows me to focus on my research and teaching in the present and recruit top-tier graduate students in the future. Please support our work at UMD by passing SB 118.

Sincerely,

Daniel Greene, PhD
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate students sit in an awkward state of limbo - are we students, or are we staff? I know that my duties and those of my fellow cohort are not those of a student, yet we are treated as such by the University. The University of Maryland routinely places amongst the lowest in compensation for graduate students at R1 universities, especially when the high cost of living in the state is taken into consideration. Not only is this wholly inadequate for current Graduate Students, but it effectively creates a massive barrier to entry because there are many that simply cannot afford to live like we do.

Collective bargaining rights are the first step in ensuring that the graduate students, which are a lynchpin to the functioning of the University, are appropriately compensated. Moreover, extending collective bargaining rights and negotiating with graduate students in a fair and good-faith manner means the university can avoid potentially damaging wildcat strikes that have been observed in recent months and years at several other universities. Giving us a legal framework to negotiate for our fair share means avoiding these less than ideal situations.

Sincerely,

Daniel James Tuke
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The right to bargain collectively is a basic human right and UMD should not be afforded the right to classify graduate students as part time contract employees. As a now retired former Union official, I urge you to affirm this very critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Daniel Robson Jr.

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

While I appreciate the efforts that the University has taken over the years to improve the experiences of graduate assistants and other student workers, it is not nearly enough. I will not cite various income statistics, minimum income requirements for living in the DC metro area, etc. since that has been presented extensively by the multiple groups on campus organizing for improved conditions and wages. Rather, I will speak only of my experience thus far as a first-year graduate student and primarily on the issue of our salary.

I was lucky enough to receive a fellowship through my department (physics), giving me an extra ~\$10,000/yr. to bring my yearly salary to \$36,720. One of the primary reasons that I decided to come to UMD was this - or so I thought - competitive offer. Coming from Boston, I figured the cost of living was cheaper than there and UMD's offer was roughly the same as the offer I received from some Boston-area schools. However, after living here during my first semester, I have found that even with this fellowship, it is not enough.

I am not sure what goes into calculating the average cost of living, but the reality is that we graduate students pay for a lot more than just rent and food. Personally, I pay for rent, food, internet (I am fortunate enough to have my utilities like heat and water paid for by my landlord, but I know this is uncommon), my car payment, gas, car insurance, health and life insurance, books, medication, and - though this was only a problem for this year - various moving costs, such as furnishing a new apartment. Even with my higher-than-average salary as a grad student, I find that this is not enough. I have barely enough money left at the end of the month to go out with friends or my girlfriend. I have been forced to rely on some supplemental income from my parents to pay for things, which I should not have to do as a 25-year old adult with an "income." I cannot imagine with grad students with a lower income or without a safety net experience...

I know the question of the University's finances is a complicated one, but I am certain that there are costs that can be cut that can transfer money from frivolous activities to graduate workers, i.e. the people that do the majority of the research work (along with post-docs) that make UMD a top-tier university. I don't know the number for UMD, but U.S. universities tend to take a "cut" from any research grant that a professor or department receives, somewhere in the realm of 40-70%. Does UMD really need that much money for an overpriced sports program, an endless list of deans of ABC and XYZ that bring nothing to the school, and new building after new building? I am not convinced that there are no administrative costs that the University cannot cut

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to improve the lives of the force that bear the brunt of the work of what this place is supposed to exist for: research and teaching. And to any objection along the lines of "that's just part of being a grad student" I say, All it takes is one top-tier university in the U.S. to provide a competitive salary and the rest will be forced to follow suit. UMD could be the one leading the charge and become a shining example of how a university can and should provide its graduate students with a healthy, living salary.

I truly hope that this message is heard. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Daniel Spencer
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The term "graduate student" is really a misnomer. It conjures up the idea that we simply get paid to study, get some career training done, and eventually get a free degree in the end. The reality is far different. The typically graduate student in reality spends the majority of their time teaching and/or conducting research - two pivotal roles for the University. In fact, I would argue that the University system as a whole would come crumbling down if it wasn't built on the backs of graduate students - i.e. cheap labor - fulfilling the job that are core to running a research university. In short, there would be no UM system without graduate students. Graduate students, or better yet graduate labor, deserves a seat at the table in deciding what is best for us. This power asymmetry has been further exposed thanks to COVID-19. Work has only gotten harder for us, yet the benefits have not kept up. Then again, when have they ever? It's clear that graduate students have held the University system up over the past year, not the other way around. Graduate labor teaching the classes and has adapted to the "new normal" and graduate research brings in the funding. We deserve better.

Sincerely,

Daniel Trettel
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am signing this petition and offering my testimony because I do not believe that graduate assistants are being paid livable wages. I have had to get another job and still have trouble paying rent. I cannot afford to buy food or support my family.

Sincerely,

Danielle Leizman
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
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SB 118
Supporting

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

Any large group that holds an essential role for a social ecosystem should also hold a fraction of the decision making power. Else, the system is prone to abuse without a legal counteraction. Since graduate and undergraduate assistants do hold important roles in the functioning of college campuses and are currently without the legal basis for collective bargaining rights, the system is flawed. I hope that the representatives recognize that the rights cannot be permanently denied without a response from the underrepresented populations and choose to take the right side.

Sincerely,

Danila Sokratov
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Collective bargaining is an important right for workers, it allows them to negotiate contracts that protect them and are in the best interests of all. Currently, UMD grad students have the second lowest stipend of any of the flagship state universities in the country (the lowest is University of Nebraska, where the cost of living is much lower than College Park). Collective bargaining would allow grad students to present a unified front and hopefully create better outcomes for students.

Sincerely,

Declan Molloy

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write to you in support of SB 118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. Labor rights are fundamental to a functioning and fair society; this holds no exception in the realm of academics. Our higher education system is built upon the idea of passing down generations of knowledge for new minds to apply and expand upon. As a graduate student in the Astronomy department, I recognize the immense wealth of knowledge serving as a foundation to the work I do every day.

As graduate students, we act in the role of both master and apprentice; I have taught undergraduates in astronomy and mathematics to prepare them for wherever their futures take them, and am myself taught how to pursue complex research questions and successfully communicate that work to a broader scientific community. Although I enjoy my opportunities in both respects, I know too many students who carry the weight of extreme financial insecurity on top of these responsibilities.

This insecurity has developed over decades of ill treatment. Graduate students have been increasingly exploited with little, if any, fair compensation. Upon completing a PhD or Master's degree, students are thrown into a dismal job market already extremely competitive before being decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For any graduate, the economic reality of academia coupled with being extensively overworked is devastating to mental health.

This has been ingrained in the perceived culture of academia. Institutions rely on the exploitation of these workers, promoting it as a stepping stone in a veritable *cursus honorum* in tenured positions they continue to replace with more graduate positions. There is no mincing words here; this problem is driven by an increasing desire for profits over education and a disturbing trend towards business-like management of Maryland academic institutions. All of this comes at the expense of the graduate students these institutions rely on to maintain the institutional mission the State of Maryland has given them.

Passing SB 118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act is an important step in the process of remedying this fundamental flaw in our public institutions. Marylanders rely on our academic institutions to promote scholarship, invest in the future of Maryland, and enable innovation. The present environment fails to fulfill this mission to its fullest extent. Economic justice and financial security will go a long way in reversing the exploitation that impairs the fundamental mission of our university system.

Sincerely,

D. J. Teal

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

PhD, Department of Astronomy

Research Assistant

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a research assistant at the University of Maryland. I write to you today to urge your support on HB 214 / SB 658.

I request your support as the Maryland State Legislature to allow graduate students the same rights afforded to the employees of any other organization: the right to organize and the right to choose to collectively bargain. We as graduate Assistants, do a lot of work at the University and we request you to give us the right to bargain as a body, just like any other state employee. There is a lot of variation in pay among graduate students and many have taken loans just so that they can continue living healthily. I personally don't receive enough money monthly that I can pay all my bills, I have to work extra hours besides my assistantship and get assistance from my parents to be able make ends meet. Once I pay for my rental, I can't make a healthy living with those remaining money.

I am requesting you to consider supporting the legislation to allow us to bargain collectively and improve how graduate students live while carrying out important research and work at the flagship institution of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Dongze He
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I will be teaching for the first time Spring semester 2022, and though I am new to Maryland and believe my stipend is generous I also believe that collective bargaining is a necessity for any collective of workers. This ensures that more voices can be heard and ensures power is more equally balanced. Additionally, other students may not be in as secure of a position as I am and I would like to be able to lend my voice to theirs to help them reach the security they need to focus on the important work of their discipline.

Sincerely,

Edward Daschle
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I support legalizing collective bargaining rights for graduate employees within Maryland so that we can be recognized and have the potential to negotiate as full employees. Without this recognition, without any formal seat at the table, policies about graduate student employment are vague.

Vague policies such as, for example, leaving parental accommodation decisions up to “department culture” are not policies at all. At best, these “policies” leave students to negotiate their status themselves with those who control their academic and early professional career; at worst, they leave students open to discrimination because of precedent set by “department culture” that is not rooted in equality and inclusion. When pregnant with my first child, for example, I received derogatory comments (fortunately, not from my advisor!). As the first woman graduate Teaching Assistant to give birth during the semester, my department had no “department culture,” and--especially after hearing these insulting and utterly degrading questions--I battled extreme anxiety as I worked with my department to shape my accommodation plan on my own. Fortunately, my individual advisor was kind and understanding, but he was at a loss of how to accommodate the many unknowns of birth and infant care within the bureaucratic layers of the undergraduate courses that graduate students in my department teach. When I contacted the University’s ombudsman, his lack of empathy and lack of knowledge about what employment options were available in my department quickly revealed that rather than a helpful resource, conversations with him were a further emotional drain and, more practically, a waste of precious time.

Like so many other systemic problems, the current COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the inequity present in vague policies for graduate students--these vague policies create and perpetuate a culture in which graduate student workers are not provided essential resources to complete their work and their own studies/research, our two primary functions at universities.

For my Teaching Assistant position during Fall 2020, I was the sole TA for an upper-level

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undergraduate course. I have two children: one was 2 at the start of Fall 2020, one was 6 months old. My baby's sitter unfortunately tested positive for COVID-19 in the second week of the semester; this news and the need to immediately begin quarantine meant we had to pull our eldest from her daycare center, which subsequently closed when my children and I tested positive. My husband and I, then, faced battling this disease within our family and caring for two young children who need constant supervision for at least two weeks while also both trying to sustain our work.

We quickly realized that in reality, the FFCRA was not so helpful; it would have allowed my husband (who had just begun a new job 1 week earlier) up to a maximum 80 hours of PTO, and myself a maximum of 40 hours. These finite numbers are not helpful because (1) your quarantine may be extended, as ours was, due to the onset date and nature of your symptoms, (2) it does not consider the continued closure of any child care center--our eldest's daycare center remained closed even after our quarantine ended, because of the different dates of exposure. As we began our quarantine, we were hesitant to use these finite hours too quickly, lest we run out and still be sick and/or without childcare.

As a graduate employee, I am afforded "time away," per the [Graduate Handbook](#). I take seriously my responsibility as a teacher--the job for which I am paid--and I am devoted to my students. As the sole TA for this course, I knew that taking formal "time away" would have a severe, negative impact on their learning, in an already tumultuous semester of online learning. As the sole TA for this course, what did "time away" mean? How was my work to be distributed? Who would do it? Who was allowed to do it? (In my department, not all are eligible to be the TA for upper-level/major-required courses.) The lead professor of the course, an adjunct, did not know...but neither did the division chair, nor members of my department's administration. On my end, as I was thrown into quarantine, battled COVID, and sought to provide my family and myself with healthful, immune-boosting meals (something that takes time and great coordination with helpful friends and family), I frankly did not have the hours, mental stability, or emotional capacity to figure out what even my department's administration did not know: the "red tape" of what "time away" meant for me, my students, and the course in this situation. I tried to stay on top of email, be available on Zoom for the required sessions, and simply survive. The result was

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that I got behind on other teaching responsibilities and was not “caught up” until mid-December; for my students, my COVID quarantine and diagnosis meant delayed and reduced feedback the entire semester. Furthermore, this experience prevented me from completing my own research and making progress on my dissertation for the remainder of the calendar year.

While COVID19 is a new--and I hope unique--situation, the phenomena of graduate student employees contracting an illness certainly is not. And yet, there are no guidelines provided to professors or departmental administrators for examples, regulations, etc. of how to handle graduate employee “time away.” My lead professor was provided with no resources, and those above her were also totally unprepared for how to provide assistance to a course without multiple TAs assigned to it. As with so many things, the pandemic has served to highlight a crucial structural flaw: not having clear policies of how “time away” may be handled for different funding situations creates impossible situations not just for students, but also for faculty and administrators.

Having the right to collective bargaining will *in itself* help to amplify and strengthen graduate student voices. University administrations will be more encouraged to make real, meaningful adjustments for graduate student employees when we have this right, even before a union is created (if one ever is). I hope you join our efforts to make possible a brighter, more equitable education system and future for us and our children.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Massey
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

By granting the graduate student collective bargaining rights, you can empower the newest members of your academic community to let their voices be heard. The struggles of graduate students - be they financial, mental, or otherwise - are well known and only contribute to the barriers preventing equal access to the highest education. Help us create a healthier and more equitable environment to advance our education and your academic community.

Sincerely,

Ell Bogat
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

My name is Emery Laurel Patterson. I am a graduate assistant with the University of Maryland Library system, and I am in my final semester of the MLIS program. I am also the GA staff representative for the Library Assembly Advisory Council (LAAC) for the 2020-2021 academic year.

As a graduate assistant, I had a generally positive experience because my supervisor for most of my program, Bria Parker, was an excellent mentor. My current supervisors, who I began reporting to after Bria's departure, Sarah Hovde and Neil Manel Frau-Cortes, are both very supportive and helpful as well. This experience, however, was dependent upon the goodwill of my colleagues. I was lucky in that the people I worked with were understanding, communicative, and helpful the entire time throughout my graduate assistantship (especially during such a tumultuous time socially).

The needs of GAs are best understood by GAs, because the role tends to vary by department. As workers, we are not treated the same as faculty or staff because of the cyclical nature of the position. Communication is an area that could stand to improve for GAs, as we are often left out of the loop of projects that we are expected to work on.

Because the needs of GAs are best understood by GAs, graduate assistants need bargaining rights. They need the ability to advocate for themselves should the need arise. I am asking for the ability to voice their concerns, just as an option. It should be a tool we have access to.

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining

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Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of SB 118. I believe graduate students should have the legal right to collective bargaining, should we vote to unionize.

At the beginning of Fall Semester, 2020, the department of physics assigned teaching assistantships to us. Several lab courses were run in person, meaning that a significant proportion of our graduate students would have to be teaching in person during a pandemic, else lose their funding for the semester. In-person teaching positions had no additional hazard pay, nor were the safety protocols in labs clearly communicated to us. The exception to this was students with pre-existing medical conditions, which students could use to ask the department to assign them to a fully online teaching position. For students to be forced into the uncomfortable position of either revealing their medical history, or choose between unemployment and personal endangerment was an extremely stressful situation. I myself am on immunosuppressants, and as a vulnerable member of the population it was especially disturbing that other graduate students in my department could be forced into a dangerous position. As many physics graduate students also rent rooms together in the same house, it is not enough to only allow vulnerable students to teach online, when in fact housemates could become direct vectors of transmission. Fortunately, the department was receptive to our negotiations, and with our feedback was able to allow students to teach only in positions they felt comfortable with. However, this could easily have gone another direction—our wellbeing was in the hands of the goodwill of the physics department heads. If they had simply chosen not to prioritize our voices, we would have had no legal recourse. If HB 214/SB 658 passes, university administrators will be legally required to at least consider our thoughts, and we will no longer be in such a vulnerable position.

An argument often put forward is that graduate students are simply students, not workers—every aspect of the PhD program is engineered for our own education, including teaching. This is patently false. My teaching assistantship last semester consisted of grading problem sets for around 60 students every week, which took up a significant amount of time. To those who consider graduate students not to be workers, I ask—how does grading the same introductory problem again and again 60 times a week contribute to my education? It takes time away from my own classes and research, and certainly does not make me a better teacher or instructor—I have very limited interaction with the students. Graduate students perform these essential functions simply because they must be done, and not because they become better instructors by

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grading. Anyone with romantic notions of PhD students preparing for professorship by doing teaching assistantships has never held one of these grading positions. As an aspiring theoretical physicist, as opposed to an experimental physicist, I will continue to grade throughout my PhD. If the logic that all our duties as PhD students are for our own education holds, then it follows that theorists are preparing for a heavier teaching career as professors, which is patently false. The reality is that theory students continue to teach beyond their first few years due to lack of funding for research assistants, not because we will be teaching more than our experimental colleagues as professors. Students with external funding are also not required to take on teaching assistantships—if these positions were designed for our own benefit, why would they not be required for students with funding? What are these teaching assistantships then, if not jobs to support us financially? As workers, we deserve bargaining rights—or at least the legal option to vote for it.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to have made a clear argument in favor of SB 118.

Sincerely,

Emily Kaiyin Jiang
PhD, Department of Physics, MCFP
Teaching Assistant
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College Park, MD 20740
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Collective Bargaining is one of the only ways for working people in America to stand up for their rights as employees and have real input on the safety and quality of their jobs. A workforce that can come together collectively to advocate for their well-being will be safer, healthier, happier and more productive than they would be otherwise. Graduate students are no exception, and UMD will be a better institution if their workers can support one another in this critical way

Sincerely,

Eric Tondreau

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing to you in hopes that you will consider voting in favor of legalizing collective bargaining rights for graduate students.

Three years ago, I applied to UMD's computer science PhD program at the recommendation of two of my undergraduate professors, both of whom had completed their PhD at UMD. They spoke very highly of the faculty, students, and staff; however, they also warned me that it was challenging to live on the student stipend.

Now, when prospective PhD students or faculty candidates ask me about my experience at UMD, I understand how my undergraduate professors felt. I love the people I work with, and the work I do, but our graduate student stipends are lower than many peer institutions, especially relative to the area's cost of living. During my first year, finding housing within my budget was a significant source of stress. When I discovered issues like bugs, mold, and mice in the house where I rented a room, I was unable to find an alternative I could afford. (Thankfully my circumstances have changed -- I now have additional income on top of my stipend, and I split living costs with a partner.) That experience made it difficult for me to earnestly recommend UMD to prospective students. I spoke with one faculty candidate who was concerned that our low stipends would impact their ability to recruit students. This candidate received an offer from UMD, but they ultimately went to another university.

My experience is just one point of data in a much bigger picture, but that's exactly why collective bargaining rights are so important. Legalizing collective bargaining rights for graduate students will allow us to "connect the dots" -- bringing together graduate students, administrators, and lawmakers so we can understand the bigger picture, and how to move forward.

Sincerely,

Erica R. Blum

PhD Student, Computer Science

Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Despite being the backbone of higher education and research, graduate students are not even considered employees. It would be near impossible for one professor to run a 200 person lecture, meaning graduate students do vital work in their field, and therefore deserve the appropriate status and ability to make change. The bulk of cutting-edge research is done with the work of graduate students, yet being nothing more than mere 'students' does not fit our description. Graduate students must be given the proper title of employees, and the right to improve working conditions. Given graduate students collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am in support of graduate assistants at the University of a maryland having collective bargaining rights since I am a single mother to two young boys. Going back to school for my masters in architecture meant that I had to quit my full time job to pursue my dreams. And while I understood the financial risk, I also decided to go to the university of Maryland due to the financial aid that was offered. The GA pay is in no way comparable to my previous salary or benefits so I just take out student loans to support my family.

Sincerely,

Erin Nivison
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am one of the lucky graduate assistants--I have a full-time (20 hr/week, 12 month) position and a decent working environment. However, my experience is the outlier, not the norm. Funding remains a source of constant stress for every graduate student I know, and some of them have had to pause or stop pursuing their degrees entirely because they were unable to continue working in the current conditions, and COVID-19 has made these situations worse, not better. I work in-person on campus, and I regularly worry that I am going to be the one to bring COVID-19 back to my household. I have seen other segments of the campus worker population exercising their right to collectively bargain and directly advocate for themselves and I support them wholeheartedly, and I believe that graduate assistants and workers should have the same abilities. Graduate workers complete essential work for this university and the university system, and to pretend our contributions are not "real work" is disingenuous at best.

My work as a graduate assistant actually has nothing at all to do with my degree program--it's not even in the same department. The work I do as a graduate assistant cannot be categorized as "academic" or in support of my course of study, it is just essential work for the university, just like other non-graduate staff workers. All of our work is essential to the continued functioning of the university, including those graduate students who work as research and teaching assistants, because collectively we make the current university system possible. As workers, we deserve the right to determine for ourselves whether or not we will bargain collectively or individually, just like all of the other workers on campus who are not arbitrarily restricted. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important it is for all workers at this university to have a process that they feel represents them fairly and that allows them a meaningful voice, and until graduate workers have the ability to collectively bargain if we so choose, we will not be fully and fairly represented in this process.

Sincerely,

Erin Taylor
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I notice that institutional discourse has dispensed with the illusion that our choice about how we feel safe holding our classes matters, and it is revealed that instructors are expected to be ever prepared to absorb the fallout from the fundamental negligence, abandonment, and individualism that have organized our experience of this pandemic. I had multiple students at the end of last semester who got covid, and had to navigate finding safe places to isolate, while moving out of the dorm for the winter, while either taking finals or making accommodation arrangements, and somehow tend to their own health and wellbeing (and the health/wellbeing of anyone with whom they share space and responsibilities of care) at the same time. A cruel and preventable situation.

As a Graduate Assistant, and therefore — by University of Maryland’s definition — not a UMD employee, my student status and attendant provisions (such as affordable health insurance, tuition remission, student loan deferment) depend on my ability to make progress towards degree completion. Even though my GA position requires fulfilling responsibilities that are critical to the operations of DCC as a program and UMD as an institution, my officially recognized relationship with the university is as a student. As students and not employees, GAs are not granted sick leave or paid time off, and cannot take a leave of absence without forfeiting health insurance, tuition remission, and student loan deferment. In the event that I, an immediate family member, or other person for whom I provide direct care receives a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, that requires attention beyond the permitted 30 hours “Time Away From Duty”, UMD’s policies state that I must rely on the goodwill, advocacy, and creativity of my supervisors and colleagues (who are being left to manage their own vulnerabilities and responsibilities of care as well) to fulfill my duties. My duties include teaching core curricular classes with syllabi that I have designed, and for which there aren’t other people available to step in and take over if I am unable to continue. So I have to absorb the pressure of choosing between my own wellbeing and the ongoing functioning of my program/my students learning experience. If an undergraduate student has a health challenge or disability, they can get university sanctioned accommodations, such as extra time or space for taking tests or note-takers. The system of administering accommodations is deeply flawed, but it does provide a protocol for students to advocate for their needs in the classroom. What accommodations could possibly exist to support graduate student instructors who need extra support or different qualities of time/space to learn, when our learning is conditioned by labor that is determined by the university calendar and departmental needs? Functionally, graduate student instructors do not have access to accommodations to protect ourselves as students, nor do we have any benefits or workplace protections as

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non-employees.

Right now we are facing so many different layers of uncertainty, and we are also hailed by the moral certainty of centering, supporting and empowering the self-determined wellbeing of those who are most endangered by this pandemic. We are in the midst of a mass disabling event and I feel unassured that the University's priorities are organized to protect the most vulnerable people. If that were the case, the initial public-facing conversation on the table wouldn't be about how the university has decided to email everyone a survey every day, develop an experimental advance warning system, have us report bio-monitoring to an unknown authority in the school, and take a responsibility pledge that requires you to buy into the University's partnership with LinkedInLearning in order to see it. We would not be receiving messages from the administration about our resilience as a community with no functional accountability in place to ensure that people are complying proactively with public safety protocols. Universities should be asking the their communities who are the students and faculty who would not be able to continue their education elsewhere, what support they require, and how to protect the livelihood of the people whose work requires them to be on campus as well as all the workers who depend on the university for their livelihood. How can the campus be a resource for those most in need? How can the university protect the economic security of the maintenance/facilities/res life/staff and faculty whose work would need to change with fewer people on campus? What is being done to protect the health and safety of maintenance, food, and emergency service workers who have to work on campus? How can Res Life and Student Services support off-campus students to have access to the tools they need to learn, and on-campus students to self-organize community for their own collective wellbeing, rather than determining it for them? I am most concerned about these questions. I haven't seen them addressed in the statements from the administration, and so I don't believe their bottom line is really about creating a safe learning environment for everyone. I am unsupportive of any measure that would ask any of us to take on that risk framed as some sort of personal choice, when we are all being coerced in various ways through the climate of unsafety produced by institutional policy.

Sincerely,

Eva Peskin
Graduate Assistant, Design Culture & Creativity Honors College
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Although thousands of Graduate Assistants at the University of Maryland teach courses, conduct research, and administer campus programs, the State of Maryland determines they are simply "temp workers", not employees, thereby denying them basic employment rights.

Support SB118, a state senate bill and grant graduate assistants bargaining rights across the Maryland university system.

As an Alumni, I'm disgusted with the labor practices supported by University of Maryland, a public institution. Collective bargaining has been a legal right for nearly 90 years. It is past time that the University of Maryland recognize these workers.

Sincerely,

Evan Papp
Alumnus, School of Public Policy
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

As graduate students, Teaching, Administrative, and Research Assistants are in a vulnerable position without collective bargaining rights. While these assistantships provide the necessary tuition support to complete a degree, the rate of pay is not reflective of living costs surrounding the University of Maryland. In College Park and the surrounding areas, it is almost impossible to find rooms or apartments under \$1,000 per month. With the increasing number of luxury student accommodations being constructed surrounding campus and the rapidly expanding DC metro area housing market, rental rates are ever-increasing. Finding a room or apartment at or below this rate is rare and often comes with problems that no one should have to face, and at the very least are not conducive to learning, such as mice or bedbug infestations or mold. Even the official graduate housing apartments are notorious for such issues. At current graduate student salaries, it is unfeasible to afford such rates unless students are receiving outside financial support, such as familial support. It should not need to be stated that not all students have this privilege. Collective bargaining rights would afford all Maryland graduate students the ability to advocate for living wages relative to the area in which they study.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Robinson-Tillenburg

Ma/Phd (in progress), Art History & Archeology

Teaching Assistant

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

We ask you to support and pass SB 118, to legalize collective bargaining rights for all Maryland's higher education public employees.

My testimony hasn't changed from that last year's bill, but here it is again if you'd like to review.

I am certain you will receive plenty of testimonies from other students sharing with you the many pragmatic reasons for this that the effects of SB 658, if adopted, are to stimulate and promote Maryland's higher education, science, and technology, furthering the long-term interests of all parties involved. I am certain you will also see plenty of social proof: how collective bargaining has been adopted by other University systems in this country to great success and benefit of all. Hence, in my testimony, I will focus on ethical, moral reasons.

This country was founded on the principle of equality before the law, and on the principle that hard work eventually leads to earnings, success, and upward mobility. Over centuries, these principles were reinforced and spread about to encompass any and every minority, for this system was designed to serve the interests of all people, not just some elite class. The right to unionize and bargain terms of employment became a universally applied and recognized right...

Except in the realm of higher education, and, in particular, not for graduate employees. This is the single domain which was widely regarded as the place of privileged, white, predominantly male elite in the past, those with the financial means, proper connections, and time to spend on education and enlightenment, to earn a status symbol of high society. However, over the last several decades this domain has utterly transformed, while the outdated public perception of it, in many circles, has endured.

The graduate students of today usually come from a much poorer background. These are often single people, who traveled from a poorer country because this situation represents an opportunity and somewhat-better conditions for them. Sometimes, these are people with families, struggling to support their spouses and kids. In yet other cases, these are people who have decided to sacrifice higher wages for a number of years in the name of science and research, brave enough to face the remaining frontiers of human knowledge. The more affluent, on the other hand, often steer clear of graduate school, for it is no longer a symbol of economic prestige, and, for many, does not truly yield additional material gains.

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Yet, here we have, some of the brightest minds in our country, all having Bachelors' and some -- Master's degrees, toiling away at some of the most qualified intellectual labor anywhere in the world, for wages comparable to those of the cleaning personnel at the same institution. And they, unlike the cleaning personnel, are not allowed to unionize. How do we, as a society justify this?

For one, we say that this work they do all just part of their training, hence they don't deserve to be treated as other workers. They're "just students". Let us dwell on this point for a bit. Can you think of a single intellectual job that doesn't require some amount of on-the-job training? Does this preclude the employees' right to collectively bargain with their employer? The answers are obvious, and we are faced with a vicious double standard.

Secondly, we say that these employees are just "assistants", they just do the grunt-work. The reality is they come and "assist", from 20 to 60 hours a week, doing the bulk of both on the teaching and research fronts. Discussion sessions, laboratory sessions, office hours, grading, proctoring, and subbing for lectures are all tasks performed -- often times, solely -- by the teaching "assistants". The bulk -- virtually, all -- of data gathering, experiment design, coding and tool-building, and analysis is performed by research "assistants." Not to leave out other graduate assistants, those often do the same work they would often do in the private sector, but for a tiny fraction of the pay. And all this is leaving aside the fact that, even if they *were* some kind of low-level assistants doing grunt work, how could that diminish their role from any other employee, public or private? Again, we see a double standard, and one based on false pretenses.

Finally, there is the question of "who is going to pay for it?". Hypothetically, let us consider any other minority out there. African Americans. Native Americans. Women. Hypothetically, let us imagine they were for whatever, as a group, deprived of the collective bargaining rights of other workers. Imagine now, that someone would use, as an argument against granting those rights to such a group, the phrase "who is going to pay for it?" The simple truth is that it would go against the very principles I spoke of earlier, principles of equal opportunity for all, to speak those words. Hence, we see yet another double-standard which cannot be overlooked or justified.

To repress someone's right to collectively bargain on grounds of prospective costs is to, in effect, recognize the importance of their role, recognize that they actually *would* be able to bargain for higher wages *because* their role is pivotal, and yet to deny them this simple right, effectively oppressing them through loopholes in the legal system, in order to save a dime for the tax-payers, as well as further secure the cozy positions of University bureaucrats and lofty salaries of tenured professors.

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When you consider SB 118, keeping the points I covered above in mind, please ask yourselves how else failure to pass SB 118 can be morally justifiable, and, if it is not passed, what it speaks of us as a state and a people.

Sincerely,

Gregory Kramida
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Computer Science,
Graduate Research Assistant,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The University of Maryland system *could not* function without the labor of graduate assistants who make very little money. My graduate assistant stipend barely pays for my rent, much less my groceries. Because our employment is often tied to our financial aid packages, we do not have the option to leave our positions when we are not compensated appropriately or are treated unfairly. We deserve greater recourse for advocating for ourselves through collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

Gwen Peyton
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I write in support of the FAAC to advocate for graduate workers to have the right to collective bargaining. I write as a chaired Professor of Computer Science who has been with the university for around 11 years now, recognizing the significant value that GAs bring to our institution -- Indeed, the main reason I am employed at UMD is because of the fantastic GAs we are able to recruit. They deserve fair treatment, and allowing collective bargaining rights will improve our ability to recruit strong GA, will lead to their better ability to carry out their duties, and will lead to increased growth in the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Due to COVID-19, multiple supply chains have been interrupted. Inflation rate is growing at a rate that significantly increases our daily expenses. I believe almost every one will feel the same if they frequently go for grocery shopping. I will appreciate the collective bargaining rights to ensure we can maintain a standard of living.

Sincerely,

Haozhe An
Teaching Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I strongly support collective bargaining rights for students; such rights make life better for them, as well as for faculty.

Sincerely,

Harold Charles Daume III
Professor, Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing to you today to urge you to support the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (SB 658). Collective bargaining is critical to ensuring that graduate students are not unduly disadvantaged in their employment negotiations with the university. The current system is not sufficient: it often leaves current graduate students in a precarious and vulnerable financial position and serves as a real deterrent to prospective graduate students seeking to learn and conduct research with the University of Maryland. It also breeds frustration within the graduate student cohort, who feel that they are unable to do anything substantial to help.

Graduate students serve as the backbone of research produced by the University of Maryland. Their contribution to the university's research, teaching, and administrative output should not be understated. It is untenable that the university looks to build and sustain a system that relies on underpaid labor. I understand that the university faces a myriad of competing pressures when it comes to funding; however, graduate students' wellbeing and financial security has for too long served as the issue to be traded off. Collective bargaining would ensure that we, as graduate students, can engage with the university on these issues.

The University of Maryland and, by extension, the state of Maryland stand to benefit greatly from a more competitive graduate program. The university is pushing talented and ambitious researches away by having a minimum graduate assistant stipend that is lower than all but one flagship state university in the US relative to the cost of living. I have just started my PhD with the University of Maryland in the Department of Government and Politics. I was fortunate enough to receive the generous Flagship Fellowship. Without this scholarship I would not have been able to accept my place at the University of Maryland. The stipend is not sufficient to support living comfortably in the DC metro area, which is one of the most expensive places to live in the US. There is little to no room for students to save. Collective bargaining would provide graduate students with the ability to work with the university to ensure that graduate students can build their own safety net. This would allow students to focus on their learning and research.

Sincerely,

Harriet Jane Goers

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Graduate Assistant, Department of Government and Politics
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

While we are students first, GAs drive the success of the academic, financial, research, and social goals established by their respective university. This bill can help amplify the voices of GAs who are supporting their university communities, while helping GAs to feel more empowered to contribute more to those communities without having their concerns be overshadowed or not acknowledged properly.

Sincerely,

Hayleigh Brianne Moore
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I believe that caring for graduate students is actually caring for the future of the public university. If we are expected to become faculty or staff at institutions around the country (or world) why wouldn't we expect to be treated with respect at the beginning of our careers. As we see more collective bargaining agreements, I believe that there is a lot of professional development that is missed when graduate students aren't a part of a collective bargaining unit. I want to go forward in my career fighting for the rights of staff and employees and I believe that starts with a collective bargaining unit at UMD.

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of SB 118 and strongly urge the State of Maryland to recognize the crucial right of graduate students to collectively bargain. Last year, as a second-year full time PhD student my package consisted of the following: (1) taking three classes each semester as a student, (2) getting paid for 10 hours a week as a Research Assistant, and (3) getting paid for 10 hours a week as a Teaching Assistant. As a Research Assistant, I evaluated a public health initiative in Delaware providing free contraception to all women. In this role, I scheduled and conducted interviews, organized and filed data, coded data, analyzed data, and drafted conclusions and recommendations as to the success of the initiative. As a Teaching Assistant, I taught content, I led weekly section discussions, I graded, and I emailed—a lot. I facilitated the students' course experience and ensure they are receiving the appropriate accommodations if they are athletes, have a disability, English is their second language, or are just having a tough semester.

While the Research and Teaching Assistant jobs are very different, they both require high levels of flexibility because they deal with real life human beings in different circumstances. It would be detrimental to the research project for me to say, "I've already done my 10 hours for the week; I'll just do it next week." Why? Because I might lose the participant over the weekend. Similarly, it is impossible to grade and provide feedback for 40 papers within the allotted 10 weekly hours, but at the same time students expect and deserve timely and constructive response.

This year, as a third-year PhD student, I am Instructor of Record for a course I TA-ed in my first year. I now complete all the tasks that a Teaching Assistant did, in addition to preparing and holding lectures. This is an assignment that is considered a 20-hour assistantship. At the same time I am expected to work on my dissertation, and to continue working on research projects that I was previously a Research Assistant on. Should I choose to drop these research projects due to lack of time and funding, I would lose any hope for authorship on the projects that I did so much of the ground work for. Without authorship on publications, my chances of an appropriate job post-PhD plummet.

A lot is expected of us as graduate assistants, for not much pay in return. While we may request to work with a specific professor, project, or course, not all requests can be fulfilled. Even if it may not be our first, second, or third choice, we understand the reality--we are assigned to tasks that have funding. All we ask in return is to be given the right to bargain collectively to attempt to slightly level out this egregiously imbalanced power dynamic.

Sincerely,

Izidora Skracic

PhD Student, Department of Family Science

Research Assistant & Teaching Assistant

4200 Valley Drive #1242

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

izidora @umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

We as graduate students deserve to have employment rights. Especially international students who are not allowed to work outside of campus.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Seltzer Bekerman
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
701 Seaton Ave, Alexandria, Virginia 22305
jacquie.sb@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I have been both a GA and an hourly graduate worker (non-GA). When I was a non-GA hourly worker, I did the same amount of work as when I did receive a GA, however, I did not receive any benefits (healthcare), and I was given a much lower overall wage, not to mention that my tuition was not covered. I think it is important for the graduate students to be able to collectively bargain because not all graduate students have the same benefits.

Sincerely,

Jaemin Eun
Department of Geographical Science
University of Maryland, College Park
9106 48th Place, College Park, MD 20740

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I urge you to support SB 118 and grant graduate workers at the University of Maryland the right to collectively bargain. We are employees of the University whose labor is an integral part of its education and research ecosystem. Graduate employees are the ones doing the grading and research that allows the University to educate Maryland's next generation of leaders and to develop the next wave of innovations that will stimulate its economy. Without this labor, classes and research would grind to a halt.

Our reward is incredibly long hours, supervisors with almost total impunity in how they treat us, and an administration that misleads you about our cost of living. Currently, most graduate students are directly supervised by a tenured professor who often demands well more than 20 hours per week, up to 60 hours in many cases. The systems currently in place to handle student grievances and hold these supervisors accountable are woefully inadequate. Complaints go to a designated member of the faculty, who has every incentive to take the side of their fellow professor and who has no oversight from the student side because without collective bargaining we have no power to organize. As an example, the Graduate School claims that they recently implemented parental leave policies, but they have no mechanism to force individual supervisors to allow their students to actually take this time off.

Rather, we are left as individuals to fight against tenured professors who make 10 times our salary and who hold our careers in their hands. Collective bargaining would give weight to graduate employees' complaints and force the University to recognize our requests, unlike the current "Meet and Confer" process. The University has no obligation to contend with our demands under this framework, which has led us to the current situation.

The minimum stipend is set based on the expected "cost of attendance," which is not even reasonable based on University-subsidized services. While I already find it insulting for my pay to be based on what my employer deems the bare minimum to survive, rather than being based on the value that I provide to the University, it is further demeaning that the University-subsidized housing costs up to \$1227 a month for a one bedroom apartment, almost twice the amount the Graduate School quotes for "rent and utilities." In addition, the "health insurance" expenses that they quote are less than the cost of the University-provided health insurance premiums, and presumably do not include the costs of receiving any actual medical care.

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While my stipend in the Physics department is enough to cover my normal yearly expenses, this would not be the case were I to have any sort of accident or emergency. And for many students in other departments, their stipends do not even cover their basic expenses, meaning that graduate school, even at this public institution, is only available for people with families who can support them well into their 20s. As a result, I would not be able to get a PhD in sociology or biology here and would likely need to exit my current program were anything to happen to me or a member of my family.

I am fortunate to be interested in a field with a stipend that can cover my expenses, but I want to stand up for and fight with the graduate workers everywhere at the University of Maryland, including workers in other departments, workers with families, workers here from abroad, and workers with hostile or abusive supervisors. The only way to ensure the greatest health and well-being for graduate employees, and therefore the best education and research for the state of Maryland, is to allow us to bargain collectively.

We deserve the right to collectively bargain because we are essential employees of the University. We need it because only together do graduate employees have the power to secure what we need to remain fully happy and productive.

Sincerely,

Jameson O'Reilly
PhD Candidate, Physics
Research Assistant
7000 Wake Forest Drive Apt. B, College Park, MD 20740
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As an alumnus of the University of Maryland in College Park, I fully support collective bargaining rights for graduate students. These students are workers and therefore are creating value for the university. They deserve to have control over their working conditions.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Mohler

3450 Elm Ave, Baltimore, MD 21211
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The university and school fees should be deducted from the GA salary. Having it as added salary is hundreds or thousands of dollars in additional taxable income that must go right back to the university. Also, having half GAs only get half tuition waivers is rare amongst universities and should be changed.

Sincerely,

Jesse Moy Leong
Graduate Assistant, Music
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support this bill because collective bargaining operates as an effective means to address cost of living and employment concerns. In absence of these rights, student employees are unable to formally and bindingly negotiate with the university to address labor and employment issues.

UMD's minimum graduate assistant stipend is lower than every single flagship campus except for the University of Nebraska, when compared with estimated cost of living. My fellow students and I are struggling under severe financial stress while fulfilling our study and work tasks.

Sincerely,

Jingshuai Du
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Because of the pandemic, the professor hiring me as a Graduate Assistant brought my work down to half-time. This was not based on my performance. In fact, he wants to keep me in his employment as long as possible, but because of a lack of funding, I was demoted. Now, I'm expected to live off of \$400 every two weeks. This doesn't cover rent, let alone food, school expenses, or mental health assistance. Additionally, the removal of opportunities for employment for graduate students allows me no other option than to stay in a job in which I don't make enough money to cover basic needs.

My employer reached out to the university to see if they could help fund half of my GA salary so that I could stay on full time. Of course, they said no. The lack of care toward students is unheard of. We already are having to deal with classes that cost the same as before the pandemic with a decrease in educational value. Collective bargaining rights could help students like me keep the employment we deserve during such a trying time.

Thankfully, I've been fortunate. Others aren't even employed because the university has essentially removed any sources of funding available before the pandemic. If we can group together and get taken seriously as a group of necessary employees for the university, maybe we can change testimonies like mine.

Sincerely,

Joanna Avery
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I have been in management for most of my life and currently work in HR. I know that looking at students as not being employees may bring some kind of advantage to the GR function of the university but at what cost. Its inconceivable that premier State University such as U of M would hide behind draconian policies and deny students the same rights as the rest of the University employyes.

Sincerely,

john McNinnie
Parent of a student
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining rights. The state of academia is extremely precarious for Graduate Students right now. We are not adequately paid for the tremendous amount of work that we put in and we are not guaranteed support by anybody except by our employer which is a tenuous relationship at best. We have no power right now and there is power in a union.

Sincerely,

Johnny Monday
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

We Graduate Assistants of the University of Maryland system keep the gears of pedagogy and administration moving, performing valuable labor to impart wisdom, skills, and experience to undergraduate students and to assist administrators with the effective functioning of the department and the school. Teaching Assistants in particular perform the onerous task of maintaining the forward momentum of their own studies while devoting significant portions of their time every week, every month, every semester to providing a valuable learning experience to students, doing the hard work of implementing the academic strategies and imparting the intellectual content constructed and assembled by instructors of record. These efforts unfailingly exceed the maximum average numbers of hours worked (20/week) deemed allowable by Graduate School policies.

Simply put, graduate employees perform vital labor for the University of Maryland and that labor must be recognized and rewarded at a level sufficient to allow for adequate living standards. The university and the state owe us that much for the valuable work we provide to make this current model of instruction function. That we are not treated as other state employees are treated and that budgets seem to put these decisions out of the hands of administrators are problems of political will. These things can be changed if we decide to do so, but our voice in that conversation has been and is limited. We are simply demanding fair representation of our collective political will and power in a negotiation for adequate compensation for our labor. Dismissals of our right to bargain collectively that rely on the 'good sense' of resolving issues on a 'one-on-one' basis reveal that those who make such arguments know precisely how this power dynamic functions and how it serves to maintain the existing state of affairs. We maintain that this is not the case, but our desire to change those affairs cannot find expression without the recognition of the political voice that our labor merits.

Sincerely,

JP Fetherston
Ph.D Student, Department of History (University of Maryland, College Park)
Teaching Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

During these difficult times, I am writing to you from a precarious position. I have spent the last few weeks reckoning with the State of Maryland Benefits office over a clerical error. At various times I have been asked to confirm that I am a state employee. I have yet to come up with a response that satisfies. I am a state employee in some regards and not in others. I have health insurance subsidized by the state, but I cannot take paid sick leave should I need to use it. This contradiction organizes my experience with graduate student employment in the University System of Maryland (USM) over the past six years.

The inexplicable loopholes around graduate student labor has caused incalculable confusion and strife in my home department. A pregnant colleague struggled to navigate starting their TA contract a week after giving birth. A colleague caring for a disabled partner felt unable to take leave, while another liberally asked fellow grads to cover their assignments without consequence. I co-authored an article with a colleague pointing out that as graduate student employees we are mandatory reporters under Title IX. However, that role demands us to act as agents of the State of Maryland and the University without receiving full recognition and protections as employees of those institutions. These confusions are commonplace. I have been fortunate to not experience overburdensome assignments; random termination; and dangerously obtuse regulations for lab workers during COVID-19.

I urge the Members of the Finance Committee to consider not only the enormous productivity and labor that graduate students provide to USM, but also the human cost of such a large sector left in precarity. Though we contribute through our labor to the local economy, we struggle to participate in it. Low income relative to cost of living; contingent employment; and limited or non-existent leave policies have a clear impact on our fiscal and physical health.

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that so many of our fellow Americans are more insecure than we knew. Granting graduate student employees the right to collectively bargain is an important component of our local, state, and national recovery.

Sincerely,

Jonelle Walker

PhD, Theatre and Performance Studies

Teaching Assistant

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

5200 Denver Dr., Galveston, TX 77551
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write to you today in full support of Senate Bill 0118, also known as the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act.

As a second-year Master of Public Policy student at the School of Public Policy, I am very interested in the current implications of past policy and the potential solutions we can offer, especially when their effects loom so heavily over myself and those like me.

Not only am I a proud graduate student at the University of Maryland, but I am also a proud international student from the Dominican Republic, and although the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recession have affected us all in numerous ways, I would like to take some of your valuable time to explain how international students have fared particularly negatively throughout the past year.

First, I must express my gratitude to the University of Maryland, and its School of Public Policy in particular, for granting me the opportunity to pursue my higher education at such a prestigious institution. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge the privilege that such an opportunity carries, knowing that thousands—if not millions—around the world can only wish to be in my shoes.

That being said, however, my current position, which I came so grateful to be in, comes with a specific set of inherent strings attached, which in times of crisis, can be particularly taxing. For example, unlike most graduate students, whether student worker or not, international students are unable to seek full-time employment, and only under certain conditions, and after an application and approval process, can we seek part-time employment outside of our academic institutions. As you know, the current recession has caused a considerable decrease in supply in the job market, making difficult for anybody seeking to support themselves, and perhaps their families, to find employment. This situation is only made worse for international students who cannot seek employment freely.

As part of the federal government's actions to alleviate the strain of the pandemic and recession on our lives, last March Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or CARES Act, a stimulus bill worth over \$2 trillion dollars. Part of the CARES Act distributed funds to institutions, like the University of Maryland, which their students could then access; students, that is, who were not international.

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Additionally, the CARES Act, also provided individuals with \$1,200 in stimulus, not including many international students, especially those who came to the United States in 2020, and, therefore, had not paid taxes in 2019. The same can also be said of the second round of federal stimulus, which included \$600 for individuals.

This is not only an issue of workers' rights, but one of looking out for the most vulnerable, those without representation, without the tools available to others to conduct change, but with the same needs as everybody else.

Keeping this in mind, it is of the utmost importance for graduate student workers within the University System of Maryland, especially international students, to be represented, advocated for, and, when necessary, have the ability to bargain collectively, seeing as our options are already slim to begin with.

Therefore, this is why I urge you to support Senate Bill 0118 in order for graduate workers to be classified as workers and grant us the right, not privilege, to advocate for ourselves, including through collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

Jose M. Munne

Candidate, School of Public Policy

Teaching Assistant

440 K St. NW, Apt. 314

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
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Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

The argument is simple fairness: the choice to exercise collective bargaining rights provides graduate students the same basic benefits of all other UMD employees. Such rights are standard across numerous state school systems (for example, California, New York, Connecticut, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon). Moreover, for non-traditional graduate students, access to benefits such as social security and retirement plans are particularly important as they embark on the multi-year commitment to their advanced degree balanced against the cost to their family and long term finances.

Sincerely,

Joshua Chiel
Teaching Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a Biophysics PhD student at the University of Maryland. Over the course of my time as a student, I have had the displeasure of being both a TA and an RA. In my time as a TA, I have worked 30+ hours under inconsiderate conditions, grading 80 or more papers every week, co-TAing 500+ students, having 4 office hours per week with 30+students every session, grading all midterms and finals, and having very little to no time for my other mandatory and necessary studies, let alone time to do daily human tasks such as eating and sleeping.

As an RA, I have had little to no guidance in my research from just about anyone: my advisor, program coordinator, co-directors, etc in my department, and absolutely no guidance from anyone in the school outside of my department, utmost including The Graduate School and its administrators. I have no say as to my work conditions as a TA and RA, and therefore have had horrid mental health and consistent thoughts of suicide due to working long hours for very little pay.

I have talked with a myriad of peers, all of whom have had similar experiences as myself. If I were to choose another school, even one more disheveled as the University of Maryland, yet had more say as to my working conditions and collective bargaining, I would choose that school in a heartbeat. Frankly, I would choose most any other school to do my graduate studies than the University of Maryland, and have told multiple prospective students this. It is unfortunate that after a year and a half, this is how I view the university that I had so much hope for when starting.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lucker
Research and Teaching Assistant at various times
8916 60th Avenue, Berwyn Heights, Maryland 20740
jlucker1@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a PhD graduate student who has held many roles at the University of Maryland College Park. In my experience as a TA, RA and simply as a student, I believe our resources are taken advantage of. The COVID - 19 pandemic has exasperated these issues by loss of funding and unsafe practices of making students go to labs in dangerous situations. I support the unionization of graduate students like me because we need to be protected.

Sincerely,

Joy Shen
Graduate Assistant, Department of Mechanical Engineering
University of Maryland, College Park
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As an international student, I have several concerns about the cost of living and taxes in the USA, specifically in the DC area. Even though we receive a stipend, it is not enough for a nontraumatic experience in graduate school. Specifically, COVID-19 has increased the prices of several items, which are almost impossible to cover with our stipend. I would suggest looking at the salary and cost that we, international students, have. You will probably find that we cannot pay a decent health insurance, nor a good transportation system, among other fundamental items.

Sincerely,

Juan David Gelvez Ferreira
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As a person who worked as a student researcher at another university, and with friends and relatives who have been in similar positions, I know how hard graduate students work, as teachers, researchers, and much more. Nowadays, with the tremendous debt so many are shouldering, not to be able to bargain collectively like other campus workers for proper pay and working conditions is an injustice that must be ended by permitting these indispensable workers to organize in a union.

Sincerely,

Juliana Barnet
Community Member, tax payer, former campus worker organizer
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a third year PhD student in the Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (NACS) program at University of Maryland, College Park, and I am writing to you in support of SB118 – granting collective bargaining rights to graduate students of the University of Maryland system. University of Maryland has an exceptional record in science innovation, and I am very grateful to be part of this scientific community, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the backbone of this exceptionalism comes from the hard work of graduate researchers and teaching assistants. By being denied a seat at the table when it comes to policies impacting graduate students, the state is telling its indispensable graduate students that they are not valued.

During my time at UMD, I have made significant contributions to two different R01 grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which have brought millions of dollars to the university. Through this work, I also provided pilot data that enabled our lab to recently be awarded another R01. Moreover, I have spent countless hours training undergrads in neuroimaging methods, which has served to augment the education they received through their classwork. Despite my contributions to UMD's exceptionalism, my graduate stipend has remained under the NIH standard, which is meager for the cost of living in the area. Giving collective bargaining rights to graduate students would facilitate more equitable solutions for everyone at the university.

On a personal note, I am step-father to two elementary school aged children who are simultaneously in awe of the work that I do, yet negatively impacted by the financial cost that graduate school has had on our family. Little things like mandatory fees due each semester slowly eat away at our ability to live comfortably. While I am not expecting professional level pay, I would like the means to voice my frustrations about such policies that the administration is likely unaware of. Opening up dialogue between the policy makers and the graduate students who are impacted by these policies will only serve to improve the university overall. I truly hope that you take a proactive approach in recognizing graduate student workers as workers, and pass the SB118 collective bargaining bill.

Sincerely,

Junaid S Merchant, MS
PhD Student in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (NACS)
Research Assistant, Psychology Department
13276 Musicmaster Dr, Silver Spring MD 20904
merchantjs@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a fourth year PhD student and parent, and I am writing in support of legislation that would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students of the University of Maryland system. University of Maryland has an exceptional record in science innovation, and I am very grateful to be part of this scientific community, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the backbone of this exceptionalism comes from the hard work of graduate researchers and teaching assistants. By being denied a seat at the table when it comes to policies impacting graduate students, the state is telling its indispensable graduate students that they are not valued.

During my time at UMD, I have made significant contributions to multiple grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which have brought millions of dollars to the university. Through this work, I also provided pilot data that enabled our lab to recently be awarded another R01. Moreover, I have spent countless hours training undergrads in neuroimaging methods, which has served to augment the education they received through their classwork. Despite my contributions to UMD's exceptionalism, my graduate stipend has remained under the NIH standard, which is meager for the cost of living in the area. Further, we have been told that if we obtain grant money from external sources, that our health and dental benefits are forfeited. Thus, something that would be a net positive not only for me as a researcher, but also for the university, becomes disincentivized. Giving collective bargaining rights to graduate students would facilitate more equitable solutions for everyone at the university.

Beyond the specific case of University of Maryland, the challenges faced by graduate student workers reflect broader societal issues that are negatively impacting the country as a whole. The pandemic has shed light on how rampant income inequality has become, and a growing number of workers in all sectors, including graduate student workers at numerous other institutions, have started organizing. In many cases, this has led to costly strikes and negotiations that have resulted in bad publicity for the institutions unwilling to provide just means to its workforce. By providing bargaining power to graduate students, the University of Maryland system could stand out as a shining example of what an equitable graduate working class can look like. This would also serve as a model for higher education in America which is suffering a "brain-drain" as a shrinking segment of the population wants to join the institutions that once led innovation globally.

On a personal note, I am step-father to two elementary school aged children who are

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simultaneously in awe of the work that I do, yet negatively impacted by the financial cost that graduate school has had on our family. Things like mandatory fees due each semester slowly eat away at our ability to live comfortably. While I am not expecting pay that is commensurate with competitive industry positions, I would like the means to voice my frustrations about such policies that the administration is likely unaware of. Opening up dialogue between the policy makers and the graduate students who are impacted by these policies will only serve to improve the university overall. I truly hope that you take a proactive approach in recognizing graduate student workers as workers, and pass the collective bargaining bill.

Sincerely,

Junaid Salim Merchant
Graduate Assistant, Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Program
University of Maryland, College Park
13276 Musicmaster Dr, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904
merchantjs@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I want to support collective bargaining rights as a current graduate research assistant specifically on increasing the stipend. The rent in DMV area is high and food is getting way more expensive since the Covid started. I want to be able to support my basic needs, so I can focus on my research.

Sincerely,

Jung-Jung Lee
Research Assistant, Department of Education
University of Maryland, College Park
4646 40th St NW STE 200, Washington, DC 20016
jungjungle24@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Kraina Sarah E. Ostrach. I graduated from the Master of Library Science (MLIS) program with the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park in May 2020. From August 2018 to August 2019, I served as a Graduate Administrative Assistant for the deans of my college.

I consider myself lucky because I did not experience many difficulties in my position, though I was distinctly aware of not having any infrastructure upon which to rely should problems arise. Although my official supervisor was the dean, we only met twice during that year. Instead, I worked with his executive assistant to discuss the details of my position, duties, schedules, etc. All of this information was informally discussed in person or over email; there was no codified contract or document outlining my duties, expectations, schedule, etc. While I am grateful that my time was respected, I must emphasize that I experienced anxiety feeling as though I had no protections should the requirements of my position change. And although I had an amicable relationship with the deans with whom I worked, I was distinctly aware of the hierarchy between us and never wanted to do anything that could jeopardize how my work or I was perceived. Indeed, I once burned myself on my way to work and ignored the injury, still trying to arrive on time. As I walked from my car, it became obvious I needed medical attention and could not perform my duties. My superiors were understanding and patient as I made a stop at the health center - but I am frustrated that I even thought I should try to go to work first. But that is what happens when there is no clear protocol for such situations.

I would like to reiterate that my experience was generally a positive one, but only due to the individuals with whom I worked. Should my superiors have demanded more of my time or changed their minds more frequently - which has happened to my classmates, and even to myself in an hourly campus position with absolutely no formal delineation of duties - I would have had no recourse to protect myself. The anxiety caused by this situation was exacerbated by the positions of my superiors as the most senior administrators in my college. In addition to taking pride in my work and wishing to do a good job, I was also concerned that any conflict or other situation could have serious repercussions.

I urge the legislature to give graduate students the right to collective action - give them a choice. The anxiety I experienced while working as a Graduate Assistant is unnecessary and negatively affects students' ability to pursue their studies and work. The difficulties that my classmates have experienced with ever-increasing duties, erratic pay schedules, and changing deadlines are unprofessional, unfair, and extremely detrimental to academic pursuits and even mental health.

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Graduate school is stressful enough. Employment where the goal posts are ever-shifting, or could shift without notice, is an unnecessary source of stress and hardship and is relatively easy to fix: give students the right and power to demand contracts, a clear list of job duties, and clear protocols for the common situations that arise while working.

Sincerely,

K. Sarah Ostrach

MLIS, College of Information Studies

Graduate Assistant 2018-2019

9303 Chanute Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814

k.sarah.ostrach@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing to you to urge you to support SB118 to afford graduate assistants the same rights as employees of any other organization: to organize and to choose to bargain collectively. We are, in deed if not in name, employees, and we deserve the same protections as other classes of employees, which are not guaranteed to us as students.

I consider myself exceedingly fortunate in that I have not had to take on additional work outside of my assistantships during my time as a doctoral student; however, that is due to the fact that my spouse earns substantially more than I do and provides a financial cushion we would not otherwise have. The \$18,000 annual stipend I was offered upon acceptance to the University of Maryland -- the state's flagship campus -- is not enough to live on as an individual adult. Certainly it is not a fair wage for the work I have done and the qualifications I hold, even when factoring in tuition remission and other benefits.

For the past year, I have held an assistantship under the guidance of kind and accommodating supervisors. They have respected my time and studies and have sought to provide me professional development and support. Other graduate students are not as fortunate in their work circumstances, but such differences in our experiences should not be due to chance, the whims of supervisors, or the fact that acting as instructor of record only counts as a "half-time" assistantship, forcing graduate students to choose between their own time and the quality of instruction they provide to other students. We all deserve fair and just wages, respect for our time, and access to hospitable working conditions, which are not guaranteed to us as students but could be guaranteed to employees through negotiation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Feagin

Ph.D., Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership

Graduate Assistant

111 Lee Ave. Takoma Park MD 20912

karenfeagin@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I have enjoyed academic, financial, and professional privileges in my roles as both a graduate assistant and a teaching assistant within the Maryland School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (MAPP). Yet, I have also experienced the following challenges:

- 1) Being paid at an incorrect and lower level than was stipulated by my “contract.” I was disbelieved by one MAPP administrator before being shamed by a faculty member for pressing the business office to correct their mistake;
- 2) Having my healthcare mistakenly terminated in June of 2019—due to the error of a MAPP administrator—during a month where I had undergone a major medical procedure. I was later asked to “remain calm” when no one could answer whether I needed to pay the thousands-dollar bill I received, whether my procedure could be retroactively covered, or even **if** my health care coverage could ultimately be restored;
- 3) Being initially denied payment for work completed during a supplemental hourly appointment, the contract for which had been signed by a MAPP administrator who later decided that “double-dipping” appointments is, apparently, “against policy.”

The result of these experiences has been financial insecurity, limitless anxiety, and antagonism and mistrust between myself and several of my program administrators. The right to collectively bargain does more than offer student-employees the promise of a potentially more stable future: it provides us legitimacy under the law to assert our interests and prevent our exploitation, whether that exploitation is intentional or not. At their best, institutions such as the University of Maryland can provide a safe space for ideas and experimentation—two things the state of Maryland needs in order to remain at the leading edge of innovation across multiple fields. But a bureaucracy that cannot be trusted to take care of its most valuable asset—students—does not deserve the power afforded by the status quo.

In closing, I support SB 118 and urge you to do the same. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kari Nye

Master of Community Planning Student ‘20, MAPP

Graduate Assistant, former Teaching Assistant

618 Venable Avenue

Baltimore City, MD 21218

nyekarinye@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate students deserve a living wage and right to organize considering the expenses they incur and the responsibility they bear in teaching and research. As a former GSA, i appreciate their commitment and value.

Sincerely,

Karyn Pomerantz
Alum, ischool
University of Maryland, College Park
6038 WESTCHESTER PARK DR, COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740-2835
pomerantzkaryn6@gmail.com

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing in support of SB 118 regarding collective bargaining rights for state personnel. I am a PhD student at the University of Maryland. As a graduate assistant, I take courses and pursue my own independent research projects, while also working on research projects for my advisors to satisfy the requirements of my funding. I am also expected to attend conferences and submit my own work to conferences and journals. I supervise undergraduate research assistants, mentor an undergraduate writing an honors thesis, and support undergraduates as they apply to graduate school. The work my fellow GAs and I contribute to our labs, departments, and the university is vital to the functioning of the university. Graduate students fortunate enough to secure their own funding (thus obviating the need for a GA position) lose access to the employee health insurance, which many students (myself included) rely on to support their families.

I have been fortunate enough to have very supportive advisors. This is not the case for all students. A GA's employment supervisor is often also their academic advisor. That means that in the event of an employment dispute about the GA's work, their only recourse is to talk to their advisor, whose support is crucial to the student's advancement in the degree program and their post-graduate employment success. Escalating a dispute beyond the advisor risks damaging the advisor-student relationship, putting the grad student's success in jeopardy.

As a new parent, I have been disappointed in the university's lack of support for graduate student parents. The current parental accommodation policy provides six weeks of "reasonable and appropriate" accommodations. This is an oxymoron, as six weeks is neither reasonable nor appropriate, especially since the nature of these accommodations is left up for the student to discuss with their advisor. The university recently opened a new childcare center, but tuition for the infant classroom is almost \$2,000 per month, with no scholarships or discounts for students. That's more than 80% of what I make.

Collective bargaining would give graduate students the ability to negotiate fair wages and employment policies so that they can be more effective students, researchers, mentors, and instructors. We need to be able to advocate for university-wide policies to protect all student workers. Student parents should be eligible for parental leave that is commensurate with that afforded to staff and faculty and we need to be able to bargain collectively in order to achieve these changes.

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Sincerely,

Kathleen E. Oppenheimer
Graduate Assistant, Hearing and Speech Sciences
University of Maryland, College Park
9104 Bulls Run Parkway, Bethesda, MD 20817

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Providing more financial support can only help our teaching and studying, as low finances often puts unnecessary and undeserved stress on graduate students / TAs during a time which is meant to be focused on schooling.

Sincerely,

Kathryn
Graduate Student, Department of English
University of Maryland, College Park
10107 Baltimore Avenue apt 4209, College Park , Maryland 20740
Kateykaroly@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I was fortunate enough to be funded by my PI's grant for my first 2 years of graduate school and was not required to teach. In my 3rd year, I was funded by an administrative GA position, which I really loved and felt gave me insight into another side of academia. As a 4th year student, I'm now being funded as a 10-hr GA (same as my 3rd year) and 10-hr TA (I really wanted teaching experience and fought for this. I feel that my experiences have been valuable, but frankly, they do not pay enough. Throughout my 3.5 years of graduate school, I have always worked multiple side hustles to supplement my stipend even though I planned not to work during grad school. I'm in my 30's working on a PhD in a field that I'm very passionate about, but it seems absurd that in order to make ends meet, I also have to babysit and bartend. I try to prioritize school and I live a modest lifestyle, but realistically, I cannot support myself on my stipend without working additional jobs. My stipend was secure/consistent throughout the pandemic (I'm grateful for this), but my supplementary jobs have been affected. My husband owns an event space/restaurant, which has been heavily affected by the pandemic, and my bartending gig is much less lucrative than it was before the pandemic. Even though I have a partner, we are now just hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. Aside from financial stress, we have also had to postpone our wedding and family planning. It's all a lot and I'm used to working on weekends and investing in my education, but the stipend that we receive is not sustainable. UMD prides itself on encouraging diversity but I know very few grad students who do not have family financial support or a partner who can carry their financial burden. Please provide us with an actually living wage, or if you cannot, please acknowledge/be understanding in your policies of students who need to supplement their income in other ways.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Yee

I'm a PhD student and this semester I'm funded as a TA and GA for separate positions, Human Development and Quantitative Methodology
University of Maryland, College Park
338 Prospect Place, Apt 4I, Brooklyn, NY 11238-4018
kat.yee15@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing in support of the state of Maryland legalizing collective bargaining for graduate students within their university system. My concerns are aimed at relatively stagnant and low student wages in the context of massively inflated costs of living in the areas surrounding the university, particularly in the city of College Park. This disparity has pushed graduate students, like myself, to seek housing outside of the immediate area to be able to afford housing. This would be less of an issue if UMD-CP maintained a robust infrastructure to provide student transportation from outside the immediate College Park area, however in recent semesters (<https://dbknews.com/2021/08/31/shuttle-um-umd-commuters-gaithersburg-bus/>) the University's transit body has eroded their service to the degree of stranding students in neighboring counties. Particular to my own discretions, collective bargaining would enable graduate students to negotiate the following.

1) Higher wages commensurate with the inflated cost of living in the areas surrounding the University.

and

2) Increased funding for UMD's transportation body to enable the hiring of more bus drivers and expansion of bus routes to neighboring counties and towns not directly adjacent to the University.

Sincerely,

Kenneth McAfee
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
8279 Paint Branch Dr., College Park, Maryland 20742
kmcafee1@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

UMD student employees are critical to the functioning of the university. Despite this, out of all top 10 schools we get compensated the least relative to local cost-of-living. This seems to me patently unjust. We should have more of a say in this.

Sincerely,

Kevin Zhang
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
3427 Tulane Drive, Apt 22, Hyattsville, MD 20783
kevin.wenfa.zhang@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate students only earn unlivable wages from the university. Spendings should only be done after careful and meticulous calculations. As far as I'm concerned, my salary can only afford local bottom-tier appartments, which will take half of my income. I don't have any other choice of living because I can not afford it.

Sincerely,

Kezhi Kong
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
406 Ridge Rd, Apt 6, Greenbelt, MD 20770
kong@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

When I first received my offer from UMD I was exhilarated. Getting my PhD from an institution of that caliber was really important for me to flourish and develop professionally. I soon realized though that my stipend doesn't go very far. From the 19k that I started at, I had to pay taxes, approx. \$700 for the most affordable health insurance plan, \$1100 for registration fees, that kept going up every year, and \$350 for parking. I was literally left with \$15,000 to pay rent in College Park, that was close to \$1k/month. I ended up having \$3k left for my yearly expenses. AT a meeting with our dept's chair we were told that the university advocates that our tuition remission counts as salary. I interestingly enough, the university considers us high-paid employees while we are barely able to make ends meet. At the same time we are expected to perform at the highest level to our students, who expect high-quality education from their "professors". I support bargaining rights so the University will prioritize its people who work on a daily basis to provide education to their students. That is why universities exist, for educational purposes, not to spend millions on new football stadiums, or new hotel complexes where its own employees cannot afford to approach.

Sincerely,

Konstantinos Pozoukidis
Graduate Assistant, ENGL
University of Maryland, College Park
334 E Main Street, Apt G09, Newark, DE 19711
cospoz@hotmail.com

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Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

As a graduate student assistant at University of Maryland (UMD), I am writing to you to express my full support of the Fearless Student Employees and ally organizations in our efforts to obtain collective bargaining rights.

The labor of graduate assistants is essential to the daily functioning of the university system. We are a cornerstone of the work that makes UMD enduringly renowned for academic and research excellence. As such, it is vital to the continued success of these institutions that graduate student employees are afforded the most basic of rights that guarantee our safety and security.

The endeavor to secure these rights has been waged for years. The financial precarity wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic serves only to underscore the absolute necessity of these basic protections. It is high time that our ongoing efforts are met with their targeted result, one that carries the wide support of graduate student employees, faculty, and campus groups.

Please demonstrate your commitment to the essential labor of graduate student employees.

Pass SB118 to legalize collective bargaining rights for Maryland's graduate assistants.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Pourzal

Ph.D. Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

Graduate Assistant

2810 The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

University of Maryland, College Park

kpourzal@umd.edu

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing to express my support to the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining right. I am a third year Ph.D. student in the department of Physics, University of Maryland. Graduate Assistant being underpaid is not an uncommon thing in the United States. While many states in this country had ensured the collective bargaining right for grad students, it is absent for Maryland, one of the most developed states in the US. Without my explanation and evidence, how the labor Union had helped protect the rights of workers is a known fact and there is no reason such right is not protected for graduate workers. As an important group of the university, graduate student workers ensure the quality of teaching and research of the university. We worked hard but we kept struggling to live. The right of graduate workers cannot rely on gestures of the university admins just like the right of workers cannot rely on gestures of the capitalists, even the working conditions are great now. Our right should be protected by the law and therefore we sincerely hope it will be the case. Please accept my sincere apology for sparing your time to read the letter.

Sincerely,

Kwok Lung Fan
Graduate Assistant, Department of Physics
University of Maryland, College Park
2117 Physical Science Complex, College Park, MD 20740
fkt8356@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

UMD has for many years taken advantage of graduate students, paying them below a living wage. My wage is so low (about \$19k), as a DC resident and UMD student I have lived below the poverty line (of about \$26k). Unlike UMD, DC has recognized the precarious and dangerous position my employer (UMD) has put me in, and has forced the taxpayers and others to pick up UMD's slack in the form of Medicaid and Food Stamps. UMD recognizes neither my health nor my right to eat nor to pursue my studies without an empty stomach. Such a situation is not only irresponsible on UMD's part, but offensive--my labor is valued so low as to be paid measurably beneath the poverty line. Recognize our labor! Recognize us as human beings! Let us afford to eat!

Sincerely,

Kyle Bickoff
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
1115 G St SE, Apt 1, Washington, DC 20003
kyle.bickoff@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I demand, for myself and my co-workers, the right to be able to hold an election for the purposes of establishing a collectively bargaining unit like virtually every other state employee.

Sincerely,

Kyle Pruitt
Teaching Assistant, History
University of Maryland, College Park
2844 Saint Paul Street, Apartment 3, Baltimore, MD 21218
kpruitt@terpmail.umd.edu

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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

Graduate student workers are essential workers. Their work produce a lot of value for the state university system and for the state overall and should be recognized for the work they do. They do a significant amount of the teaching and research. Providing collective bargaining rights for graduate students will help insure that this important work force is fairly compensated and protected so they can continue to make their contributions to our community.

Sincerely,

Landry Horimbere
Graduate Student, Department of Physics
University of Maryland, College Park
907 Philip Powers Drive, Laurel, MD 20707
landry.horimbere@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As a member of PTK faculty at UMD, and formerly as a Grad TA here, I have engaged in numerous, failed efforts to win bargaining rights for PTK and GA employees in this state. We need them because we unprotected, at-will employees.

For example: During Covid, like many others, I have worked many many hours each week over what would be considered a FT work week. But our contracts do not protect us from this. No one will pay us for this, or even thank us in particular. But unlike tenured, staff, or other regular employees, we get no leave or comp time. My annual,two-semester contracts = one 91/2-month contract. I spent most of my unemployed, UNPAID two and a half summer months in 2020 taking UMD and Zoom training programs to help me increase my online teaching effectiveness. I SHOULD NOT HAVE NEEDED TO SPEND THIS TIME AS AN UNPAID VOLUNTEER! UMD has no way to provide me comp time or pay for this.

Like GA students in this state, PTK staff need union representation too.

Sincerely,

Laura Suzanne Gordon
PTK
University of Maryland, College Park
7905 Lockney Avenue, Takoma Park , MD 20912
lsgordon@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining. I work very hard to provide for the state of Maryland by contributing research and teaching efforts towards the University of Maryland at college park. However my efforts Feel unrecognized at times considering the very low pay wage of graduate assistants. It is my duty to uphold the high reputation and dignity of the university however this becomes difficult when we are being burnt at both ends Without proper recognition. The COVID-19 pandemic has extended my degree at least one year as I could not conduct the research necessary to complete my doctoral degree. I am therefore having to back finance and reach out for additional loans to accommodate for basic needs such as housing and food while working over 60 hours a week.

Sincerely,

Lauren Eagan
Graduate Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I work at the University of Maryland in a 20 hour/week position through the office of student activities, which actively promotes student well-being on campus by providing programs and services that bring together the campus community. Through this position, I am afforded a graduate stipend of \$28,000, which does not cover basic living expenses in the college park area, nor the large majority of the DC-metro area. However, this part-time work is needed in order to compensate for daily expenses that I accrue as a student, which I am pursuing to better the education systems in our country that will lead to economic and social development. However - the question is posed - why is it made so difficult to do so? Shouldn't our country and state want to incentivize students? Isn't this how a society develops? Simple changes such as recognizing employee's rights such as this measure are part of the incremental process that will pave the way towards equitable development. I implore you to support collective bargaining rights for student workers as it supports students, our community, and state.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Haavik
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Graduate student workers are workers, and have the same needs and rights of employees in other settings: healthcare, time off for illness, housing, fair compensation, etc. But because we're treated by the law as students first, we often have trouble fulfilling those basic rights. For example, we often don't find out about our teaching assignments until the last minute - and that can make simple problems like securing a lease on an apartment a nightmare when we don't have proof we'll be employed in a few months or any way of providing evidence of income. (I had problems with this just last summer.) Classifying GAs correctly - as employees - and supporting our right to collective bargaining rights would go a long way towards addressing this kind of unstable, precarious arrangement.

Sincerely,

Leo M Johnson
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

The yearly stipend from UMD is relatively lower than similar universities such as Ohio State, UT Austin, etc., while living cost based on the location of UMD is vastly higher than Columbus or Austin.

This situation makes the student employees experience huge financial difficulties, especially for international students.

One example would be: the housing cost. Normally a 1B1B apartment in Columbus would cost for about 1000 dollars, while apartment with the same quality in the metro DMV area would cost 1800 to 2500, which is dreadfully higher than Columbus.

I would like the university to also consider that during the pandemic, student employees are facing the stress from academics, family, workloads, and future job market. Living in such difficult situation has impacted my personal mental health severely, and I am seeking medical therapy at the beginning of 2022.

Sincerely,

Liangjun Shi
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing this letter to urge you to support SB118.

As a first year student and graduate assistant, I support this bill because collective bargaining will begin to address the egregious gap between our stipends and the cost of living within the DC metro area. As a middle school educator, I am apt at making a budget stretch, but our current employment system is not sustainable. I chose the University of Maryland to begin to envision a world for my students, but I cannot focus on my studies if I have to focus on surviving in this area.

Maryland would join some of the top-ranking universities who have established the right of collective bargaining for student workers. I call upon your sense of justice and equity to support SB 118.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Allen

PhD Student, Applied Linguistics and Language Education,

Graduate Assistant

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University of Maryland

College Park, MD 20742

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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

Collective Bargaining is essential to fair, equitable, and inclusive practices in higher education. As a fourth year PhD candidate, I have struggled to come up with rent, money for groceries, and gas while engaging in some of the most cutting edge research that directly benefits society. Without collective bargaining, higher education may well see brilliant scholars and minds choose different career paths because the money and benefits are unable to provide a livable wage in an area with a high cost of living.

At this time, I am forced to take on additional employment so I can simply pay my bills. Doing so puts undue stress on my mental and physical wellbeing. I live in continual fear of not being able to make ends meet. This is a solvable problem if the State were to grant us Collective Bargaining rights.

As a Graduate Assistant, I teach classes alongside faculty (contingent and permanent) who receive significantly more compensation per class hour than I do. This is no way to encourage students to pursue higher education and continue to do the research that is essential building a healthier, more robust society.

Sincerely,

Lindsey R. Barr
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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

In my experience, the university treats graduate students like students when it is convenient, and employees when it is convenient, always in such a way that benefits the institution rather than the students. As an example, the university treats 20-hour per week graduate assistants as “full-time,” because the rest of the time they are “students,” and then claims that their nominal hourly pay rate is quite decent, even though it is barely, if even, livable in the area. Graduate students are the lifeblood of a research university, and the institution should support them with a true living wage. If the institution cannot or will not do so of their own accord, then graduate students ought to be able to organize on their own in order to obtain the support they deserve and need. For these reasons, I support collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

Lucas Butler
Associate Professor, College of Education
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing to support the the passage of SB0118, allowing graduate students to legally decide whether collective bargaining is best for them.

This right would validate two key aspects of graduate student work and experience. First, it would recognize that graduate students do valuable work, contributing to the financial well-being of the university and their fields of research, and second, it would recognize that "learning happens everywhere" (including on the job) and that while graduate students provide valuable and highly skilled labor, we are learning both formally and informally. By recognizing the reality of graduate students of today as workers, we as Marylanders can position ourselves for a future in which the leaders of tomorrow have learned to recognize the the rights workers.

I work and study in a STEM department and field, and it is well known that there are not enough US citizens and permanent residents pursuing advanced degrees in these fields compared with the current need. A major reason for this is working conditions, which Americans with STEM undergraduate degrees can avoid by instead pursuing jobs in industry. This gap is filled by international graduate students, many of whom have fewer options. This avoids addressing the problem itself and is, at best, a short term solution. All graduate student workers deserve better.

I am fortunate to do work I love together with nurturing and skilled mentors, teachers, and peers. However, loving one's work does not mean that one should not have the opportunity to collectively bargain together with other workers.

I currently work on two projects that directly impact Marylanders. One of these arose in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the contributions of graduate student workers like me to the State of Maryland, there's simply no excuse to deny the right to collectively bargain for reasonable living conditions and fair compensation for these contributions. I look forward to seeing SB0118 enable a better, brighter future for our state and our public universities.

Sincerely,

Lydia Stamato

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Graduate Assistant, Department of Information Systems
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120 N Rose St., Baltimore, MD 21224
lstamato@mailbox.org

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am a second-year, second-semester master's student in Library and Information Science, with a focus on Access Services and Data Librarianship. I am also a graduate assistant in the UMD Libraries' working in User Services. I do the work of a staff member and I am lucky that my department director and supervisor feel the same; I feel valued. I support collective bargaining for this reason: I want all of the other graduate assistants to feel secure in their work position. We all have enough stress between completing coursework and work assignments, worrying about having all of that taken away with little cause should not weigh us down. There is the additional issue of equity across assistantships to ensure that graduate assistants are not overworked and are given clear expectations from the beginning. Collective bargaining is about coming together to fight for all of us at the same time.

I felt called to submit testimony because I have seen two sides of the graduate student experience: caring only for myself and being the sole support for two people. I got married this past year and my partner has not been legally allowed to work since July 2019. I have been the only person in my household with a paycheck. Because of our situation, I also have to pay for health insurance for both of us, reducing my income even further. That stress combined with immigration, coursework, and completing my unpaid field internship has made these few months difficult. I would not have been able to complete my degree without my assistantship and its meager salary keeping us barely above the poverty line. My reality exists in stark contrast against the perception of graduate students as young people, dependent on parents, living by their wits and loving it. This has not been my experience, nor the experience of anyone I have met in my program. The out of state tuition for the University of Maryland is exorbitant and the requirements for qualifying for in-state tuition are unattainable for a post-graduate population that can't be geographically bound due to an already over-saturated academic market. There is no good solution right now, just the bandage of tuition remission covering the gaping wound of the cost of living, \$1,000+ semester fees, and now required health insurance. The argument that graduate assistants should get additional work ignores several things, namely time, resources, and legality (specifically for student visa holders), and does not question why graduate assistants should have to have secondary (or tertiary) positions to make ends meet. Collective bargaining will not solve this problem immediately but is a means for graduate assistants to work together in a meaningful way without fear of retaliation from the administration.

Sincerely,

Margaret Rose Hunt

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Master's Library and Information Science, College of Information Studies
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I'm writing in support of SB 118 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. I am lucky to be a PhD student in Entomology, in a department and lab that generally value my mental health, ability to maintain work-life balance, and ability to support myself during my studies. Having this kind of support lets me focus on my work instead of being worried about whether I'll have time to do it all or whether I'll have enough money to support myself. It lets me take joy in my research and classes. I can see the impact of our typically good working conditions in my fellow graduate students, and it's been backed up yearly by surveys where Entomology has some of the highest satisfaction evaluations of all departments.

But the thing is, this really is just luck. I know that these supportive working conditions aren't true for all graduate students at the University of Maryland. Without the ability to collectively bargain, our individual circumstances are left up to luck in having progressive PIs and department heads. This means that so many graduate students are dealing with the arduous and exploitative dynamics widespread in academia. These conditions don't make for better teachers and researchers. They make it hard for us to flourish and do good work.

Writing from the perspective of a healthy working environment, I firmly believe that allowing collective bargaining, allowing graduate students to negotiate for healthy working conditions, is win-win for UMD and for graduate students. When we can achieve the fair working conditions that all people deserve, we will flourish.

Sincerely,

Maria E. Cramer

PhD Student, Department of Entomology, CMNS

Research Assistant

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Hello, I would like to begin by saying I enjoy working for the university but did not know when I began that I would not be considered an employee. I moved from another state after finishing my Masters degree, where I worked for the institution while being a student; I was considered an employee at my previous institution. Upon accepting the offer at the University of Maryland to earn my PhD and work for the university while I attended, I was very excited. I assumed that since I was able to get health insurance and received weekly paychecks that I was an employee. I found out the hard way I was not.

Last summer, (2020) I accepted a seasonal position but unfortunately, due to COVID-19, I lost my job. I did not have summer funding from the university or a back-up job and was relying on my summer job to earn one fourth of my income for the year. After losing my job, I applied for unemployment but encountered issue after issue. First off, the Department of Labor and Unemployment was IMPOSSIBLE to reach and when I did speak with someone they had no idea what was wrong or told me something different every time. I applied May 31st, when my role at the university ended, and to this day I have not received a penny from the state.

First, I was told it had to do with my last job in North Carolina and quickly applied for unemployment there but found out I was ineligible for unemployment as I hadn't worked in NC for a year. Then I was told I did not have sufficient work history. I had no idea why they would say that--I worked for the University of Maryland! It was not until contacting a Maryland State Delegate that I found out I was not considered an employee. I had no idea this was even possible and proceeded to speak to unemployment and the university about the issue. They led me in circles until I was able to speak with someone (through email, no one was willing to tell me in person) and they told me I was a student who received a stipend. I found this out in September, 4 months after applying for unemployment. Administrators and faculty do not tell students they are not considered employees and I believe this should be illegal.

Under the CARES Act I should have received Unemployment from the State of Maryland. Individuals with insufficient work history legally qualify for unemployment due to this act but to this day the State has been unresponsive and refuses to pay me a cent. I spent countless hours calling people, waiting on hold this summer, working part time jobs, stressing out about finances, and trying to figure out the situation. No one at the university (except other grad students) seems to care or want to help students in my situation. To say I am furious about this situation would be

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

an understatement. I am lucky to split my bills and housing with my partner (who also lost his job during the pandemic) but if I lived alone during the pandemic I would have been unable to afford rent and basic necessities. As someone who came straight from completing their Masters and has never worked a full time job before, I do not have substantial savings to live off of. However, I no longer have the energy or time to debate with unemployment about my situation and aside from getting a lawyer, I have no other option but to accept defeat. This means I will not receive back pay or the \$600 of weekly unemployment I deserve.

I design and teach my own class at the university yet I'm not considered an employee. I am called "professor" by my students who look up to me and expect their instructor to be a legal employee. Over the past 6 months, I have debated leaving the university due to the stress and agony I experienced this past year. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a job in the economy right now and I do enjoy my role but I often question if it's worth it. When prospective students ask me about my experience at the university the first thing I mention is this issue. I discourage individuals from attending full-time and working for the university, especially if they are relying on it as their sole source of income. We are not undergrads who can rely on our parents for money (even many undergrads do not have this privilege), we are adults trying to earn a living while working towards a degree that we will use to better the world. Even if we could rely on external sources for income, that adds to our stress levels and is no excuse for denying us the right to Collective Bargaining.

It is time for the university to improve working conditions for graduate students and prove that our hard work is valued. Without graduate students, the university would not be able to provide several classes and operate at the standard it does. As a graduate student who teaches and works for the University of Maryland, I am in full support of Collective Bargaining Rights.

Sincerely,

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing in support of collective bargaining rights for graduate student employees in the State of Maryland; I urge you to pass SB118

I have been a faculty member at the University of Maryland College Park since 1988. I just stepped down from directing my department's undergraduate Bachelor of Arts program in American Studies for ten years. Our Ph.D. students provide most of the lower level coursework for our degree program. I cannot consider them instructors-in-training or apprentices. Many of our graduate assistants teach every facet of our courses, just as I do as a professor. They create their courses, select the readings, write the syllabus and determine the course calendar. They prepare and teach every class session. They hold office hours to help students succeed in their courses and they do a lot of informal advising. They create all of the assignments and do all the grading, work out the grading scale, and turn in the grades at the end of the semester. They have persevered through this awful pandemic where online teaching increases their workload dramatically and where they have extended care and concern and resourcefulness to help their students learn. Their work to teach their classes is identical to what I do as a tenured professor, so they are clearly employees, like I am.

While graduate assistants function as employees, they are treated like second class citizens. This starts with their low stipend. In a humanities department like mine, students teach 1-2 courses a semester and they often can't teach during the summer. Their stipend for the year is \$17,980, below poverty level for our region. In the humanities, students are not working as part of a grant-funded team so their stipend is not supplemented by monies from a grant. \$17,980 is their total income and they are not expected to take on any additional employment to make ends meet. The average rent in our area is upwards of \$1000/month, so the stipend doesn't stretch to maintain students adequately with a healthy diet and enough money to cover their books and expenses. A UMD Dining Services survey completed in 2018-19 found that 25% of our graduate students are food insecure. We suspect the percentage has gone up since the pandemic took hold in our region.

In addition, graduate assistants are often put in the situation where they have no workplace rights at all. They can be asked or manipulated into working more than their maximum (for fulltime GAships) 20 hours a week. They often have no recourse to protest this kind of exploitation because their work supervisors also have control over their progress toward the degree and toward the kinds of opportunities that help them build successful credentials. They often choose to suffer in silence rather than risk losing their GAships or angering professors or administrators who have control over their graduate student careers.

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In most departments on campus, graduate assistants perform crucial work that enables students to get the courses they need to graduate on time. Our grad assistants teach excellent courses and provide important mentorship to undergraduates. I know this because my administrative position for the past ten years was the complaint department for dissatisfied students and I hear the praise and testimonials that our undergraduate majors pass along to me...and very little criticism.

Graduate assistants—whether they are teaching, administrative, or research assistants, enable our universities to move students through to completion of their degrees, assist units to manage their workload, and professors to supervise life-changing research programs. The university could not meet its obligations to the State of Maryland without these crucial employees.

Permit me a last anecdote. Last March, one of my students looked to be in ill health and fainted while walking across the campus. It turned out that her pallid demeanor and fainting spell (not the only one) was caused by extreme hunger. Her family had had extra expenses—a car repair and a required expense for a child in public school--and she did not have enough money for food, once the expenses were paid out of her meager stipend. It is important to remember the sacrifices our students are making for their educations. Our grad students are human beings: daughters, sons, mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers who work hard at their jobs and hard at their studies.

For all these reasons, graduate employees need and must have collective bargaining rights. They are critical workers on our campuses and they deserve a stipend they can live on, dignity, and the means to report and remedy exploitation. I urge you to please support SB 658.

Sincerely,

Mary Corbin Sies

University of Maryland Faculty, Department of American Studies

University of Maryland, College Park

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Unionization does not hurt the relationship between graduate students and their faculty supervisors; it makes it a professional relationship. Faculty and university administrators who claim that if graduate students unionize it will change the fundamental "mentoring" relationship between graduate students and faculty ignore the fact that graduate students at some of the most elite graduate programs in the world are unionized and have been for many years. Moreover, graduate students at University of Maryland are woefully underpaid. UMD ranks lowest in the Big Ten, when salaries are adjusted for cost of living. It is a blot upon the reputation of UMD that many of its graduate students are forced to live at or below the poverty line just to get graduate training.

Sincerely,

Matthew Miller
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write in support of SB 118, which would give graduate student employees in Maryland Universities the collective bargaining rights they deserve like all Maryland state employees.

At every stage of university life, graduate employees are vital to the success of Maryland universities.

Take, for example, the high retention of students that the University of Maryland, College Park boasts (95.2% of first year students according to January 2019 information). This is due to graduate instructors like me. I teach at least 38 students a semester in a public speaking course. I take the time to connect personally with each of my students to ensure they feel heard, seen, and recognized amidst a crowd of almost 30,000 undergraduates at UMCP. While faculty lecture to 300 students, graduate employees make sure each student understand the content and go into the world ready to develop fearless ideas.

This continues in every corner of the university: Curriculum is revised at the granular level based on graduate student research, design, and feedback. Academic departments run like a well-oiled machine because of graduate employees in administrative positions. Laudable accomplishments from faculty across campus are made possible by graduate research and teaching assistants. Some of those graduate employees are even the ones making headlines for their laudable accomplishments.

We may be learning by doing; we may love what we're learning and doing. But this is not A reason to not give an employee the rights of an employee. Without graduate employees, this university would crumble.

If Maryland wishes to continue to boast its strong university system and compete with private universities and other prestigious state universities, it must focus on retaining graduate students. The first step to honoring their work is by giving them bargaining rights so that supervisors and employees can negotiate fair working conditions, especially hours and pay.

I urge you to support this bill so that graduate employees across the great state of Maryland can continue to develop fearless ideas and fearless students under fair conditions.

Sincerely,

Matthew Salzano

Ph.D. Student, Department of Communication

Graduate Teaching Assistant (Instructor of Record), COMM 107: Oral Communication

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Over the last two years I have been at UMD, prices of everything have continued to go up as normal and even with a cost of living adjustment, pay has not increased enough to keep up. I am in the physics department, which pays better than most of the other programs, and can still barely make ends meet with nothing left over to save. Other departments literally do not pay their student employees enough to cover the cost of living in college park.

Sincerely,

Max Trevor
Research Assistant, Physics
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Collective bargaining rights benefit everyone. They provide much-needed community, formalized processes for various problems, and help stem the great tide of worker burnout, isolation, and disillusionment. Having collective bargaining and unions in place also serve more abstract (but essential) goods like workers feeling that their work has dignity and is meaningful. Organization means affirmative duties to one another as workers, and helping the powerful make informed decisions that retain employees.

Sincerely,

Max Wiggins
Graduate Assistant
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants for the betterment of employment conditions, wages, and ensuring job security and rights.

Sincerely,

Md. Tarikul Islam
Graduate Assistant
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

There is no reason as to why your graduate students, who are some of the most vulnerable during the pandemic, should even have to explain why we don't deserve to be exploited and deserve to have control over our means of production. Not to mention we have been exploited while risking our lives because schools are open with the highest numbers seen of COVID-19. Some of your graduate students study the effects of structural violence, commodification, infectious diseases, and all the issues associated with a capitalistic mindset. It is an utter failure when you encourage us to study these things without looking at your perpetuation of the problems we face and deal with every single day. Without graduate assistants, most schools would fall apart. We strive in our own classes to have to also manage classes of our own while struggling to eat. It is not only UMD's job but UMD's duty as said in their mission statement to provide us excellent service....hold up your end of the deal. The time has come.

Sincerely,

Melani Harden
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate students across departments receive vastly different treatment and funding. While none of us are out to bankrupt our department, it is ridiculous that many of the extremely qualified educators pursuing higher ed degrees have to look to other departments (mostly STEM fields) for funding they can make a living off of.

Sincerely,

Melanie F Hardy
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The ability for graduate workers to advocate for ourselves through collective bargaining is a fundamental step in improving our working conditions. Graduate workers are essential, as universities increasingly rely on us while tenure positions are being removed. Because positions in our academic fields are disappearing, there has never been a more pertinent time for graduate students to participate in collective bargaining: we do this not only to help preserve our safety, security, and livelihood, but we also do this to help the next generation of graduate students who face an even more challenging future in the world of academia. Collective bargaining would lay the groundwork for the future of academia: if we want to retain talent and ensure high quality university education for the next generation, the right to collective bargaining is not only necessary, but urgent.

Sincerely,

Melissa Davis
Graduate Assistant, Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park
1349 Kenyon Street NW, Washington, District of Columbia 20010
mdavis39@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

The contributions of graduate students to the university are vast and significant. Indeed, without graduate students much of the work that allows the university to function and be successful would not be performed. For example, while instructors provide lectures to the students at-large, they have minimal one-on-one interactions with their pupils. In contrast, teaching assistants like myself lead bi-weekly discussion sections, prepare problems and activities for students, administer quizzes, proctor exams, and grade mountains of work. Additionally, while professors secure funding from various government agencies and industry partners, it is the research assistants that deliver the promises this funding is contingent upon. Similarly, many metrics for the quality of the university are a function of its research contributions, which are quantified by publications, patents, and citations. It cannot be understated that scoring high in these areas depends upon graduate students' ability to perform quality research.

Thus, there is an obvious throughline between graduate student wellbeing and university quality, and there is an obvious connection between wellbeing, wages, benefits, and working conditions. Viewed in this way, it is only reasonable that the agents responsible for the success, quality, and essential daily operations of our institution, i.e., graduate students, be allowed to negotiate the terms of our employment, and therefore quality of life.

Sincerely,

Michael Rozowski

Ph.D. Applied Mathematics & Statistics, and Scientific Computation, Department of
Mathematics

Teaching Assistant

8307 Patuxent Ave, College Park, MD 20740

mprozowski@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a full time doctoral student in Mathematics Education with two small children. I receive a full stipend along with some extra financial awards from the College of Education and I would not be able to support myself, let alone my children, if it were not for my partner's income (that of a public school teacher).

As a secondary education supervisor, I perform an essential function for the University of Maryland's College of Education. Without my services, the College of Education's MCert Interns (Teacher Candidates) would not receive the support and guidance in their field teaching placements they need to become competent high school math teachers. I also work with several professors on a National Science Foundation-funded research project, and help maintain the Center for Math Education's website, among other responsibilities. This is all in addition to taking 10 (doctoral-level) credit hours of courses per semester and caring for a two-year-old and a six-year-old.

I understand and appreciate the fact that I am receiving part of the compensation for my labor in course work. However, my labor is essential to the functioning of the College of Education and, as a laborer, I have no representation or voice. I am told how many hours my work will take each week--an estimate that frequently falls well short of the mark--and I am not paid enough to live. If it were not for the love and generosity of my partner, I would not be able to continue my career as a graduate student.

If the University of Maryland seeks to uphold and preserve its reputation as a progressive, inclusive, and human-centered institution, it must allow its graduate students to collectively bargain for their labor. If it instead continues to unilaterally extract un- and under-paid labor from its graduate student population, the University will publicly declare its own hypocrisy and the emptiness of its progressive claims.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael William Krell

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Graduate Assistant, Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy & Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a graduate assistant at UMD College Park and also an international student. Since I am not able to legally work off campus, it is very difficult for me to live only with the stipend I receive, especially since I do not get any funding during the summer. Also, my department does not offer undergraduate classes, so all our GAs work administrative jobs, that do not have to do with our field and will not help us be competitive in the job market upon graduation. Having bargaining rights would mean that we could possibly negotiate higher stipends and assignments that are relevant to our careers.

Sincerely,

Micheline Wilson
Graduate Assistant, Second Language Acquisition
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

As a faculty member in the computer science department at the University of Maryland, I interact with graduate students every day as my students, my mentees, my research assistants, my teaching assistants, my colleagues, and my friends. Without graduate student employees, I simply could not accomplish my research and teaching goals. Graduate students do much of the work that supports the hundreds of millions of dollars of external research funding the university receives each year, and much of the work that leads to the research breakthroughs and awards that the university is justifiably proud of. Graduate students also do much of the work that allows the computer science department to scale up the undergraduate curriculum to support continually increasing enrollment, even while the number of faculty available to teach classes in the department has not increased.

However, graduate students are not treated and compensated in accordance with their critical role in university life. Our best-paid graduate students in computer science receive about \$27,000 per year, which is significantly below the living wage in Prince George's County and significantly less than in many graduate programs, even those in locations where the cost of living is substantially lower than here in Maryland. In fact, it is comparable to the salary I received as a graduate student more than 10 years ago, in a much less expensive location. Empowering graduate students to negotiate for living wages -- and for compensation commensurate to their enormous contributions to the university -- is the right thing to do for the students, but it will also improve the university's ability to attract the best and brightest new students.

Salaries are not the only important issue for graduate students. Our traineeship model for PhD students has many wonderful benefits, including the ability to build close working relationships, as well as lifelong collaborations, between advisers and advisees. But it also creates structural risks of exploitation, because advisers have significant power over their students and few checks on their authority. Empowering graduate students to negotiate working conditions will add equity to that relationship and ensure that graduate students are treated as the valuable employees they are. This balance can help to ensure that a good-faith mentor-mentee relationship can thrive.

Graduate students are at the heart of the university. I strongly support their right to collectively bargain, enabling them to protect their rights and build the kind of security that can springboard long-term success. SB118 is not only the ethically correct choice, but also the practically correct choice, to maintain and increase the long-term strength of the university, and I strongly urge you to support it.

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Mazurek, PhD
Associate Professor, Computer Science and UMIACS, University of Maryland
5236 Bredan Iribe Center
College Park, MD 20742
mmazurek@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing this letter to you to urge you to support SB 118. My name is Mireia Toda Cosi and I am a Ph.D. candidate and a student representative at University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Supporting the bill is taking a stance for our rights. It is asking to allow students, those who so choose, to bargain for our own wages and working conditions, a long overdue matter. The impossibility to do so, belittles our role in the university in comparison to other state employees, who already enjoy this and other rights. We, graduate students, are a vital part of the success of the university, and even its faculty. We are at the core of this symbiotic relationship that produces top-notch research. Even when our administration repeatedly attempts to ignore our concerns and needs, students never cease in their efforts.

Current wages are heavily dependent on the individual departments, which are not allowed to go below a minimum. However, said minimum is scarcely over \$20,000 per annum at UMCP for a 9.5 months appointment. For an international student, that means an after-tax monthly pay of about \$1700. From this pay, \$1631 (with an extra \$250 if you are an international student) revert back to the university in fees. This yields a negative balance at the end of the year. Personally, my year closed with a negative balance of \$2000 despite my thriftiness. This translates into a whole month of pay being taken away. Not only that, but the luckiest student finds a reasonable rent for \$700, while many pay far higher prices. The pay is in exchange for an alleged 20 weekly hours of work. On this salary, students also have to study full-time, research, and publish. If that were not enough, 20 hours can become more with the little control there is over the duties carried out by Graduate Assistants.

This situation results in many students taking up side jobs, and requiring more time to graduate. It is common to come across graduate students working 2-3 jobs; that is if they are even in the position to do so. International students are not allowed to work outside of campus, much less on top of the 20 hours a week. The meager pay and the lack of opportunities over the summer leave students forlorn, incapable of making a living wage. It is a never-ending attempt of staying afloat. This situation hinders our academic careers, also harming the university's own success. What company would benefit from distracted employees?

Being able to bargain our own wages would allow for an open dialog with the university, and for students to regain the power and respect other employees enjoy. It would improve the mental and physical well-being of our student body. Not only that, but it would yield a positive impact on the work produced at the university. In turn, it would render more benefits and save costs to the institution in the long term (e.g., reducing the need to provide counseling).

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Thanks a lot for your attention and consideration. I hope that my testimony has helped provide insight into the beneficial impact of the bill upon both, the student body and the institution itself.

Sincerely,

Mireia Toda Cosi
Ph.D. student, Second Language Acquisition
Administrative Assistant
4605 Clemson Road
College Park, 20740, MD
todacosi@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am extremely concerned by the lack of bargaining rights for graduate students. The work we do is essential, especially during COVID. TAs are often the only people able to give students individual support and learning accommodations that make UMD College Park such a successful school. Even though TAs are essential, our position is very precarious. Though I love my job, I'm very aware that it would take just one manipulative professor to force me to work more hours that I'm contractually obligated to. If that were the case, I would need bargaining power to get my proper compensation. Wage stagnation is also a major concern for me. My wage is just barely livable, and I'm worried about the cost of living increasing over the next 5 years I'm in College Park due to gentrification. I love this school, but I came under the pretense that I would get a degree without debt. If I had to choose between continuing a degree at a deficit or getting a more lucrative job in industry, the choice would be simple. In conclusion, collective bargaining rights would make my sense of security, both economic and emotional, much more concrete.

Sincerely,

Mollie Shichman
Teaching Assistant, Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a graduate assistant with the marketing communications department at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, College Park. I fully submit this effort to unionize so we may use the power of collective bargaining for our rights.

Sincerely,

monis khan
Graduate Assistant, Business School
University of Maryland, College Park
3711 CAMPUS DR, COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740
monis222@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am 34 years old and I recently left a career at Microsoft to conduct research in artificial intelligence as a graduate student at the University of Maryland. I am married, have a young daughter, and my salary as a Teaching Assistant is slightly less than what I pay for my daughter's daycare. Despite that, I love this work and I am proud to be working on problems with the potential to benefit society and national security. This is my job; it is a hard, meaningful job, but it is not paid like any of my previous jobs. I knew that going in, and my situation is fortunate enough to allow me to have made this choice. So the situation is a good news story for me, but it is not a good news story for the University of Maryland. The University of Maryland is falling behind in competitiveness.

The University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Illinois all have graduate student employee recognition, and the University of Maryland is last in the Big Ten for graduate student pay compared to cost of living. I made the choice to leave industry for research, but not everyone makes this choice given the incentives that are stacked against them. Work in industry is undoubtedly important, but I would love to see employment in national security research and future innovation research stand a fighting chance against employment at Facebook or Twitter. The University of Maryland is a treasure of which the state should be proud, and granting graduate student workers full employee recognition will only make it stronger.

Sincerely,

Monte Hoover

3832 Porter St NW, Apt F390, Washington, DC 20016
monte.b.hoover@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I think that Graduate Assistant are doing a lot for the university of Maryland communities (faculties and students). I believe that we should have the right to social security benefits and others thing that we are not granted right now.

Sincerely,

Myriam Cisse
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
3420 toledo terrace, Hyattsville, Maryland 20782

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Members of the legislature, I am writing to you to ask that you support SB 0118. I am an alumnus graduate research assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park campus. As a native Houstonian and transplant to the DMV area, the shock of higher cost of living with minimal pay differences from University of Houston's main campus was not lost on me. Where I was able to afford a car and gas to commute long distances within the Houston area, I am yet to be able to afford multiple trips into Washington DC, at a mere 7 mile distance, in my five years in the DMV.

I am writing to you to ask your support for this bill as collective bargaining offers an effective means to address not only cost of living and healthcare concerns, but most importantly, fulfilling employment rights and responsibilities of student employees. When research and graduate assistants do not have a way to formally and bindingly negotiate with the university to address labor and employment issues, they are unable to contribute productively to not only their employer, but society at large. This is evident from multiple studies that have shown that at least one-third to half of PhD students suffer from mental health challenges [1][2]. SB 0118 would reduce student worries and thus, mental load, stemming from lack of official duties, financial and healthcare concerns. This additionally ties in to not only maintaining a healthy workforce but also retaining talent within the nation, limiting brain drain to other countries, furthermore, ensuring that national security is not compromised.

Many of my old and new colleagues have already testified to the details of damages, mental or otherwise, incurred as a result of lack of worker's rights in the University student employment system. I hope that I was able to make a clear and direct connection between having an educated, healthy pipeline of innovators to ultimately, the safety and security of our nation. Your support of SB 0251 is paramount to the future of our country and I urge you to vote in favor of it.

[1] E. Pain, "Ph.D. students face significant mental health challenges," *Science* (80-), Apr. 2017.

[2] K. Levecque, F. Anseel, A. De Beuckelaer, J. Van der Heyden, and L. Gisle, "Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students," *Res. Policy*, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 868–879, May 2017.

Sincerely,

Naila M. Al Hasan

PhD, Department of Materials Science & Engineering

Alumnus Graduate Research Assistant

1119 12th Street Apt B

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naila.alhasan@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I think the income is comparable to the schools in low-expense areas. So the stipend is not quite enough for us.

Sincerely,

Nan Zhang
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
Benjamin building, College Park, Maryland 20740
nanzhang@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I have been a PhD student at UMD for 7 full semesters now. I was a TA for 3 semesters and an RA for the other 4. Each TA session involved teaching 2 groups of 25 students each. I was required to lead 2 lab sessions each week- a total of 6 in-person hours- and grade lab reports, sit in office hours, as well as attend lab prep meetings weekly. On occasion, I would also be asked to substitute for other TAs or faculty members who were unavailable.

Although I was paid during these semesters to be a TA, I would describe this work as filling only about half of my allotted time at work. Every TA in my department also has to make progress in their research, and (in the initial few years) take several courses in their research specialization. So there are a lot of responsibilities, and they are not mutually reinforcing. It is very difficult for a TA to ask a potential advisor for more time to complete a research task because they have to spend all night grading exams or lab reports for the class they are teaching. On the other hand, if their advisor decides to terminate their position in the group for any reason, or withdraws advisory support, there is nothing a TA can do about it. TAs are dependent on advisory support not only for career advancement (and that dependence is almost complete), but also for things like maternity leave and childcare leave.

Given how much TAs and RAs contribute to the academic program at UMD, having some form of collective bargaining agreement to provide basic worker protections is the least that should be available to grad students

Sincerely,

Naren Manjunath

PhD, Department of Physics

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write today respectfully urging you to support SB 118. I am a second-year PhD student at the University of Maryland, College Park, in the College of Information Studies. I'm also a student representative for the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC). I care deeply about the success of my university and the wellbeing of all students, staff, and administrators, and so I care deeply about this bill, which would grant us GAs the democratic right to collectively bargain and have a say in our workplace.

There are many reasons why I support this bill and why I believe others should as well. First, it has been 20 years since the 2001 legislation banning our right to collectively bargain, and many attempts have been organized since that time. The meet-and-confer process that was established in lieu of collectively bargaining rights does not work. Issues such as unlivable wages, unregulated hours, lack of childcare, unclear job expectations, insufficient grievance procedures, workplace abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disproportionate rates of mental health issues, and the lack of other basic workplace protections and support systems still persist. The administration has not been responsive to these issues, falling behind other universities that treat their GAs better. The first step to remedying this is to grant us the legal protections and rights that other employees get at universities in the United States.

These issues not only affect our ability to teach, learn, and research, but it also affects the entire institution and USM mission. Lack of stability, living wages, child care, and more negatively affects the educational experience of undergraduates at UMD, as well as our competitive rank with other universities who are unionized, like University of Michigan, and the ability to recruit new talent. I often get asked by prospective PhDs about stipends and collective bargaining rights, and it's clear from decades of research that stronger employee and collective bargaining rights lead to more worker stability, health, and wellbeing, and thus better teaching and research outcomes.

Stability is key for any individual and group to perform, and right now we desperately need a legally binding democratic right to collectively bargain for that stability in order for us GAs to feel supported, valued, dignified, and be able to conduct our teaching and research to the best of our ability. As someone whose work is dedicated to social, racial, and political justice—studying social, ethical, and political dimensions of technology innovation and society—I honestly believe that this bill is a step in the right direction. So I thank you for considering this bill, and I

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urge lawmakers to support this bill that would give GAs a voice in creating a dignified, equitable, and supportive workplace and living conditions for all GAs.

Sincerely,

Nate Beard
PhD Student, iSchool
Research Assistant, GAAC Representative
4161 Fieldhouse Drive, Patuxent
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

In order for a fair relationship between the graduate students and the university, I believe the students must be able to have as much of a voice as the administration itself

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Ryan Fried
Teaching Assistant, CHPH
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

It is absurd how GAs' breaks (e.g., lunch breaks, sick leaves) are not officially guaranteed in the GA policy. Because GAs are not recognized as employees and we have unclear job expectations, I literally had to work from 9am to 5pm having only 20 minutes of break one day, and I was asked to make up my work hours when I requested sick leaves. My supervisors said that I should take my lunch break time aside from my work hours, as I do not have employment rights. Also, there was one day when the university sent out an email to inform the university employees to take a break. My supervisor mentioned that I should not take a break from work because the university system only sent out that email to university employees. I did reach out to the school ombudsperson to seek help, but he essentially told me that other GAs are going through worse times (and he did not seem surprised by all the episodes I shared with him). It is disheartening that GAs cannot have basic employment rights and yet are asked to do so much work.

Sincerely,

Nayeon Yang
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair SB 118
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Supporting
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I would like to express my unconditional support of SB 118 and to implore the members of this committee to support it as well.

I presently serve as a Graduate Assistant (GA) at the University of Maryland's Anthropology Department. As a student/employee, the capacity and definitions of my duties are often ill-defined and seemingly boundless. My responsibilities at any given time can include a combination of teaching, mentoring, research, data entry, administrative work, travel, fieldwork, peer review, editing, conference preparation, and more; all of which is solely covered under my graduate stipend without consideration to the amount of hours logged or the quality of the work provided. It is not an anomaly for a GA in my department to perform their graduate duties akin to the approach of a full-time professional job, and for younger grad students, this is in tandem with a rigorous course load.

A prominent example of how rigged this system is against graduate students is the discrepancy between paid hours and worked hours for 9 month assistantships. The law requires that we are paid as "part-time" researchers/TA's during the school year (Sept – May), receiving pay for only 20 hours per week. In my department and across the graduate school, our advisors expect, nay demand that we work more than that for our various projects, so it ends up being closer to 40-60 hours per week. Because we do not have a system of organizing, graduate assistants have no serious recourse of accountability for advisors that exploit the free labor of their pupils, nor do we have the ability to obtain compensation accurately to the true amount of labor we provide. All of this has drastic effects, severely weakening our resolve as a group and damaging our personal lives and mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented new challenges for our relationship with the university, often forcing us to be flexible beyond what would be considered reasonable labor obligations. Graduate students deserve the right to effectively advocate for ourselves and to work at our universities with dignity and prosperity, which can only be truly achieved through leveraging our shared interests as a collective body.

The University of Maryland and all public graduate programs in this state would not be able to operate without the labor of its graduate student workforce, and as such, we deserve the ability - as all working members of society do - to organize on behalf of our collective interests. Year after year, we secure a vast array of monies and accolades on behalf of our respective universities; and yet, despite our significance, this institution has stood in the way of our capacity to achieve a fair standard of living and an equitable share of the resources obtained as a result of our labor. I believe wholeheartedly that through acquiring the right to collectively bargain and formalize our labor through a 3rd party representative, that graduate assistants, the academic community, and the entire State of Maryland will benefit as a result.

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Sincerely,

Nicholas Galloway
Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I write to you today from a place of privilege, I am Graduate Assistant for the Department of Resident Life, I am pursuing my Masters in Higher Education and have very good experience with both departments as a graduate student . As you discuss the proposed bill, please consider that my experience is not that of the majority and often times does not represent many of the graduate student employees. I felt the need to provide my testimony today because history has shown us that testimony from those who stand to gain the most from change can be overlook due to questions of validity. It is easy to not understand the impact of overworked and undervalued assistants as the results of their work is mostly apparent at an individual level. As an assistant who is valued and pushed to growth both professionally and personally, I understand the importance of being able to self-advocate for your needs, and in turn the needs of those who you serve. I strongly urge you to support student rights for self-advocacy through collective bargaining as not only does it provided graduate students with the voice they deserve but also allows the needs of education and progress to persist. Teaching assistants are the backbone of education and undergraduate students seek their support in their educational endeavours. Without the ability to self-advocate, graduate assistants are often overwork and simply do not have the capacity to properly serve the student population. I want to make it clear that this is not a cry for help, but rather a request for a seat at the table. Graduate Students have earn that right, all I am asking is that you honor their work.

Sincerely,

Nick H. Velasquez
Graduate Assistant, Department of Resident Life
University of Maryland, College Park
2602 Kinderbrook Ln , Bowie, MD 20715
nickjhv@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

One of the most difficult things about being a graduate student is the feeling of not having a voice. In the face of peers who are having a tough time or working amongst faculty who can sink your career if you set a foot wrong, it is difficult to feel that what we say matters. This is why I support collective bargaining rights for graduate students. It will give us a voice in what matters.

I have to have another job to live with a reasonable standard in academia. Many of my friends don't have that, and need to rely on a family member or partner just to pay rent. This shouldn't be. Collective bargaining lets us fight for a living wage without having to be beholden to whether or not the department or our advisor simply decides if we deserve it on a case-by-case basis.

I hope you will consider voting in favor of collective bargaining rights for graduate students.

Sincerely,

Noel Warford

PhD, Computer Science

Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant

7911 Kreeger Drive, #204

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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As an international student, it's very difficult to sustain given the inflationary pressure in USA and devaluation of currency in my home country.

Sincerely,

Nouman
Graduate Assistant, Smith Business School
University of Maryland, College Park
3429 Tulane Drive, Apt 12, Hyattsville, Maryland 20783
nouman.ali@marylandsmith.umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Collective bargaining rights are some of the most fundamental worker rights there are. It acknowledges that workers should be treated with dignity and aren't just disposable slaves.

Graduate assistants and especially research assistants are what enable our university (UMD) to be one of the best schools in the country. My department (computer science) ranks in the top 10 in the country in terms of research output. My lab (the cybersecurity lab) is arguably in the top 10 in the world! This is all possible because of the highly skilled professors and exceptional graduate students this school attracts. However, this program is unsustainable. When considering work hours (very much in excess of 50-60 hours a week for most) we're essentially paid considerably lower than minimum wage. How does the school expect us to survive on that especially with the price surges that COVID brought? We need bargaining rights to force the school for fair pay.

Our program is one of the best in the world, if it wants to remain that way, it needs to show that it values its graduate students with the most basic worker rights.

Sincerely,

Omer Akgul
Research Assistant, Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
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omerakgul58@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining rights because I believe it helps graduate students assure fair and safe working conditions, especially in light of how COVID-19 has impacted study, funding, and research, as well as the safety of our working conditions on campus.

Sincerely,

Phoebe Moh
Research Assistant, Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
930 Wayne Ave, #303, Silver Spring, MD 20910
pmoh@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing in strong support of collective bargaining rights for graduate employees, and urge you to pass the resolution introduced in a prior session as SB0118. This is extremely necessary for all the graduate employees who are at the forefront of novel research, teaching undergraduate and graduate students, and carrying the bulk of administrative duties and logistics ensuring the smooth functioning of their respective departments.

I am a doctoral student and a graduate research assistant. I have also been a graduate teaching assistant helping facilitate learning in both 200-level and 400-level undergraduate courses which are critical to undergraduate education in my department. Me and my fellow graduate employees make significant contributions based on a considerable amount of daily work, but our efforts are often exploited because we lack the necessary power and rights to negotiate for fair compensation and benefits. At the very least, we deserve to have our voices heard and have a functioning seat at the table when it comes to discussing and negotiating our benefits, which often determine our very livelihoods for many years. Our responsibilities also tend to increase with various roles, and unforeseen changes like the recent pandemic means adjustment and addition to our roles, efforts, and contributions. However, without collective bargaining rights, we have no say in how any shifts in responsibilities are accounted for in our pay and benefits. This can lead to devastatingly poor working conditions with no real say in how to get out of such conditions.

Collective bargaining rights will vastly help with graduate employees taking a reasonable measure of control over their working conditions instead of having to rely on the sympathy and good-will of faculty or other administrative employees. A say in the pay, benefits, and other variables that have a large impact on our lives will go a long way in helping improve working conditions and is also really the only fair option. I urge you to support me and all graduate employees by supporting and passing SB 118. To be completely honest, not passing this bill is a big stain on UMD's reputation and potential for future graduate students and employees who may want to bring their talents to our university, but may be deterred by working conditions and especially having little to no say in doing anything about it.

Sincerely,

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Pranav Goel
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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pranavgoel403@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The most important factor for maintaining good and fair relationship between the employees and the employer is the equilibrium between their powers, rather than something as unreliable as the benevolence of the employer. Collective bargaining, as a powerful tool for employees to protect their rights and welfare, is certainly something that should be granted to the graduate assistants and student workers to redress that delicate equilibrium.

Sincerely,

Qiuyi Chen
Research Assistant, Department of Mechanical Engineering
University of Maryland, College Park
8509 63rd Ave, Berwyn Heights, MD 20740
GENIUSCQY@GMAIL.COM

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

As a 3rd year graduate student, researcher, and instructor at UMD, I know how much we as GAs, RAs, or TAs contribute to our departments and the university. We are a crucial yet often hidden and undervalued resource that forms the backbone of our community - we conduct important research and often take on the tedious grunt work, we write and contribute to cutting edge, informative publications, we submit and receive grants, we teach and mentor undergraduate students and research assistants, we help recruit more graduate students to the program, etc. that all supports the continuation and reputation of the university and its faculty. Yet, we are often treated like the bottom of the barrel, with unlivable pay, no benefits, no protections, and little guidance and support in the event of problems we encounter. Collective bargaining rights should be the bare minimum for us as graduate students, and the university should be committed to treating us fairly and well, given all we contribute during our many years at UMD. There is often and unfortunately a toxic culture in academia, and a huge power imbalance when it comes to graduate students up against those who are higher up. It is necessary and imperative that graduate students have collective bargaining so that we are all more protected, and so that the risks and work of improving graduate student life at UMD do not befall just a small group of individuals. This is also more efficient - the voice of many is more powerful than just relying on the voice of one (or some).

Sincerely,

Rachel Ghosh
Graduate Assistant, Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology
University of Maryland, College Park
1127 Fairview ct, Silver Spring, MD 20910
rachghosh17@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

To continue to support a fair, equitable work environment for graduate employees, faculty must do more to understand the economic precariousness of graduate students during the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Rachel Stroup
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
45 N Shafer St. Apt B5, Athens, Ohio 45701

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

We absolutely have the right to collectively bargain. We work at the university, we conduct funded research, we teach the UM system's students, and we do all this both in pursuit of a degree and (more importantly) as our job. This is our livelihood right now. We are paid so that we may eat, pay rent and utilities, help support families. But unlike many employees who work to accomplish these same needs, we are unable to improve our conditions when they are harmful. The right to collectively bargain is not exclusively a matter of higher pay; it is also a mechanism through which we can work with the university to protect ourselves against departments or advisers who mistreat us. When things are good for us, of course we don't feel that we need this. But when things get bad, we suddenly realize we have no substantial voice. We are at the mercy of the departments and advisers who have turned against us, and we have no one in our corner. Right now, we are forbidden from having such a voice within our workplace, the university. I strongly urge you to overturn this and grant us, as graduate workers, the right to collectively bargain. I appreciate your consideration and representation of us.

Sincerely,

Ramsey Karim
Graduate Assistant, Department of Astronomy
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing this testimony to support collective bargaining rights. As a graduate student working for the Department of Mathematics in the University of Maryland, College Park in the past 2.5 years, I feel that we don't have a working environment good enough and are the negligible group in the community. This should not be the case. Graduate students do the teaching, research and other critical works. We should have higher pay, better work conditions, and beyond all this, most importantly, our collective bargaining rights.

I want to address the problem of working environment with the following example. Last summer, I took a position as an instructor of a summer undergraduate course for the Department of Mathematics. The course ran 8 weeks, with a 80 minutes lecture every day, given by me alone. I also needed to assign homework, grade homework, make exams, grade exams and hold office hours. The department only offers a teaching tutor, who is shared by many different instructors. To be fair, the pay is okay, but what I felt most uncomfortable with is that the department has almost no guidelines or assistance during me teaching a whole course! The only thing they provided me is some syllabus from last year and nothing more. Unsurprisingly, they never checked on how the course was going. All these made me feel very isolated, especially since we are in a pandemic and the course I taught was offered online. I don't think this could be considered as a good working environment, and also, is not fair to the undergraduate students who paid such a lot of tuition fees to attend a course which was taught by a young man/woman with few experience and had almost no support from his/her department.

However, although I don't like the working environment and felt pitiful for my undergraduate students, I had no way to ask for more mentoring. I believe this is not a single phenomenon, but our voices could hardly be heard. Without collective bargaining rights, during the 5-6 years of our graduate study, we don't have to argue for a healthier working environment.

Sincerely,

Ran Tao
Graduate Student, Department of Mathematics
University of Maryland, College Park
5341 Stream Bank Ln, Greenbelt, MD 20770
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I can confidently and unequivocally say that if I had to rely only on the salary which I receive from the University of Maryland as a Graduate Assistant, I would not be able to buy enough food, pay my rent, or pay for health insurance. The fact that I am able to do these things is in thanks ONLY to the fact that I have a savings account and my parents continue to support me. The fact that I am able to survive by overdrawing from my checking account and being forced to pull from my savings account to buy groceries is thanks to prior years of saving money before I arrived to Maryland. Simply said, I would not be able to survive off of the salary I currently receive. This is due partly to the extremely high cost of living here around the DC area, and the state taxes here in Maryland. My salary is already comically low, the high amount of taxes taken out of my salary is further insult to injury. Consequently, the extreme differences in the salaries received by students is endlessly frustrating. Why, I ask my self routinely, does someone receive \$5,000 a year more than me when we have the same job but work for different departments. My financial situation, as I watch my savings account dwindle every month as I approach complete financial disaster, has brought sleepless nights and extreme anxiety. Additionally, I am unable to move to a cheaper area or move back in with my parents due to the fact that my boss requires that I personally come into work even during the ongoing pandemic. Altogether, I beg that lawmakers work with representatives from the University to support the future educators, scientists, researchers, and leaders of America earn a living wage as we fight (quite literally) to survive.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Cawthorne
Graduate Assistant, English Department, Physics Department
University of Maryland, College Park
3300 East West Highway, Hyattsville, MD 20782
cawthorr@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I urge you to support SB 118, and to reverse the ban on collective bargaining rights for graduate students at all schools in the University of Maryland system.

In this past year I saw the damage that COVID-19 has caused to many of my fellow graduate students, and specifically how the lack of collective bargaining rights contributed to their strife. I have always supported the efforts to grant these rights to graduate students. Last year I wrote testimony to the Assembly outlining the multiple ways in which graduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park are vulnerable to be taken advantage of in their positions and how graduate students at other Big Ten universities have protections in place that we do not.

My concerns were brought to realization when COVID-19 caused catastrophic cuts to the university system. In our offer letters from our department, graduate students are guaranteed 2 full years of a Teaching Assistantship before they are required to move to a Research Assistantship. However, over the course of last summer, the Associate Chair of Graduate Education in our department began threatening first and second year students with the possibility of cutting their Teaching Assistantships. This was an effort to force students in Research Assistantships and free up departmental funds. Graduate students in my department, including myself, had to work tirelessly to push back on our department's attempts to coerce students by threatening to take away what was promised in their offer letters.

Graduate students are professionals and are the essential workers of the higher education system and university research enterprise. We are the ones that keep undergraduate courses running, even during a pandemic. Without our work, the university system would fall apart. We deserve to have the promises made to us kept. And we deserve to have stability in our employment, especially during a pandemic. This will only be ensured through securing our rights to collectively bargain.

Sincerely,

Robert Paul Dalka

PhD, Department of Physics

Research Assistant

1531 W Falkland Ln, Apt 240,

Silver Spring MD 20910

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

rpalka@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate workers deserve to have bargaining rights to adapt to changing needs (i.e. Covid straining worker capabilities)

Sincerely,

Rushil Dandamudi
Research Assistant
4626 Woodberry Street, Riverdale, Maryland 20737
rushilcd@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I support collective bargaining rights for all University of Maryland System graduate students because as young academics-, researchers-, and professionals-in-training, it is crucial to have the right to organize as a unified body.

Collective bargaining empowers the student body to address the financial, administrative, and workplace barriers that can interfere with pursuing the quality, innovative research that we as graduate students contribute to the university community.

Our ability to advocate for appropriate working conditions, pay, and benefits is of the utmost importance to ensure we are able to make the most of our graduate student experience, further enhance our contributions to the academic community, and set a strong foundation for every single student's career.

Sincerely,

Rya Inman
Research Assistant, Department of Geographical Sciences
University of Maryland, College Park
5285 Rivendell Lane Apt 4, Columbia, MD 21044
ryainman16@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

When becoming a full-time graduate assistant, it is made clear that university work is supposed to be your singular focus. Our stipends are supposed to function like a normal wage so we can focus on doing the best research and teaching we can. For many students, including myself, this is impossible. My stipend is not enough to pay my rent for a one-bedroom apartment in College Park. In order for my stipend to pay rent in the area, I would have to live in apartment buildings known for cockroaches and theft. I have to work another job to support myself, creating constant stress that interferes with my ability to do my university work. Graduate assistants do work for the university, and therefore should have access to a living wage.

A living wage cannot happen without collective bargaining. Currently, graduate assistant stipends are determined by the amount of funds available to the students' department or college. This means that students doing the same amount of work in different departments get paid differently, essentially punishing students who wish to work in a less-funded area. For example, my stipend in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership is \$5000 less than the stipend for a student in the Department of Computer Science. There is no logical reason that students in some fields should be paid significantly less than students in other fields. Fixing this requires change on the university level, which therefore requires collective bargaining.

Being a graduate assistant is my job. To the people I work with, I am their employee. Legally, I should be considered an employee, too.

Sincerely,

Ryen Burris
Graduate Assistant, Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park
9630 Milestone Way, College Park, MD 20740
burris3857@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am writing to express my support for the passage of SB118, which would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students at the University of Maryland. As a graduate assistant (GA) at the University of Maryland, College Park, I play an integral role in the continuous operation of university functions. For example, over this past academic year I have provided research assistance in a major project designed to improve the way that librarians help patrons protect their privacy when using public computers. This is a project that has far-reaching implications, and will be able to help many people in protecting their online privacy, a topic that is of the utmost importance right now. My fellow graduate students and I all work on projects that will have a serious and lasting impact on our society. Knowing the weight of this, we strive to put in the hours necessary to complete these projects on time, often needing to work more hours than we are compensated for. The compensation for our work is not even enough to pay our bills; I am lucky to have a spouse with a government job, but if I was not in this position I can say without a doubt I would not be able to afford to be a doctoral student. No single person can live off of \$20,000 a year; if one is lucky enough to find an apartment for \$1,200 per month, that leaves \$5,600 a year to live off of. Those of us that have tuition remission are still required to pay fees, so that's another thousand dollars gone. Who can live off \$4,600 per year? That money must cover food, a phone bill, utilities, books for school, and various other expenses. This is impossible.

The University of Maryland gets nearly \$600 million dollars in research funding in a given year. It is exploitative to pay graduate students less than a living wage. It is unjust to expect students to live off these stipends without recourse, not having the ability to advocate for higher wages. Without collective bargaining rights, it is nearly impossible for GAs to get what they need from the university in order to create a safe and healthy working environment. I vehemently believe that the right to unionize would create an avenue for GAAC to advocate for the needs of GAs much more effectively and successfully.

Sincerely,

S. Nisa Asgarali-Hoffman
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
4130 Campus Drive, 4th floor, College Park, Maryland 20742

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

snahoffman@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

It is vitally important that graduate students and other instructors and students in higher education in the state of Maryland be allowed to collectively bargain. We should not have to give up our civil rights as employees of the state. The work of higher education is more than necessary to our culture, and at this moment even more so. As our world faces now to negotiate pandemic disease as well as enduring problems such as racism and sexism, we need an informed and analytical population to not only address but cope with these challenges. Graduate students are vital to that effort on so many levels. Our world has changed significantly since many of the structures of higher education formed. It's time that work in higher education is the same as any other work in our society. Please support this effort.

Sincerely,

Sabrina Baron
Principal Lecturer, History
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am currently a bi-national Ph.D. student in Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Maryland (USA) and at Kiel University (Germany). I am also a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellow as well as a Clark Fellow. I have been an active member of the A. James Clark School of Engineering since 2013. In undergraduate, I served in many prior student leadership roles including Clark Engineering Student Ambassador, and Vice President for the undergraduate Materials Science Student Society. Since I have been in graduate school, I have directly supervised various interdisciplinary research projects for 10 undergraduate students, and five master's students.

I am writing this letter to implore you to make vital reformations to the graduate school program at the University of Maryland, College Park. I will outline the most urgent concerns of UMD graduate students, provide methods for rectifying concerns, and highlight the profound benefits the university will incur if changes are made. I thank you in advance for your serious consideration of this testimonial.

In virtually all cases, UMD graduate students receive a salary that is insufficient to satisfy their cost of living and basic necessities. This places students under undue financial strain, with no good option for remedy. If students work a second or even third job to accommodate their financial needs, it will redirect substantial amounts of time away from essential research functions they provide to the university. If students focus entirely on their academic duties, the financial strain of living paycheck to paycheck will drastically lower their ability to make productive contributions to the university. This is in addition to the myriad of devastating physical and mental health effects that chronic stress exerts on the body and mind. Simply increasing the salaries of graduate students would alleviate a major cause of stress, redoubling motivation and productivity instantly.

UMD graduate students also suffer from a lack of standardized health benefits. Each department provides disparate insurance plans, with the commonality across the board being low quality. If a student were to develop an acute problem, they cannot be assured they will receive proper care. If a student has a chronic health concern, they cannot be assured they will be able to afford their medication. Even a perfectly healthy student lives with the constant underlying concern that they are underinsured. With the massive expectations placed on graduate students, they can hardly afford to be getting sick in the first place. Providing all UMD graduate students with the same standardized options for quality health insurance would give peace of mind to these concerns.

Graduate students at Maryland are greatly overworked. I have seen regular examples of my colleagues feeling compelled to work 12+ hour days, staying in the lab until midnight and quite frequently work on weekends and holidays. Even if the students were being properly compensated for their huge amounts of overtime, which they are not, such a work schedule is completely unsustainable. Consistently working long hours drains the morale of students,

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causing sleep deprivation and mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety. It is apparent in many cases that Ph.D. advisors place heavy burdens on students so that they may achieve goals that are in their own best interest as professors competing for funding, publication, and prestige. This culture of servitude rather than mentorship and growth is an unethical philosophy. Research science is a discipline that should be focused on progress over large periods of time that contribute to society. There is no reason to exhibit a false sense of urgency that places students under a high level of duress. Students should not be made to work excessively without proper compensation. Either they should be compensated, or hours should be reduced.

Finally, UMD graduated students need the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. Without the ability to come together in solidarity, students have no chance to negotiate better terms of employment for themselves. Students feel a sense of learned helplessness; either they must bend to the will of their advisors and the university graduate program at large, or they face the prospect of being removed from their Ph.D. program. The underlying threat of removal from the program, in the absence of the ability to unionize, perpetuates poor conditions of employment for dedicated students. Granting graduate students the right to unionize and negotiate with their superiors is a basic liberty that would bring to light unethical practices.

I would like to conclude my letter by addressing the profound benefits the University of Maryland will enjoy, should these reforms be instituted. First, retention will improve. With students feeling happier and more secure in their livelihood, more of them will see their Ph.D. to its completion. Second, acquisition will improve. With the newly minted graduate students salaries, benefits, and rights, more prospective graduate students are likely to choose UMD for their Ph.D. programs. Third, the university's reputation will improve. UMD will gain prestige as a research institution, increasing the amount and magnitude of government funding and other grants. Last, UMD's graduate program will have a larger societal impact. UMD will gain ethos as an institution that demonstrably contributes to scientific progress, the ultimate goal.

We are aware that these are not small requests, and we greatly appreciate your consideration of the aforementioned reforms presented in this letter.

Very respectfully,

Sabrina Curtis, M.Sc.

Binational Doctoral Candidate Materials Science and Engineering:
University of Maryland, College Park, USA and Kiel University, Kiel, Germany

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow (2018 – present)

A. James Clark School of Engineering Fellow (2020 – present)

Former Treasurer of Materials Science and Engineering Graduate Student Society (2017 - 2018)

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

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Former Vice President of the Undergraduate Materials Science Student Society (2016 – 2017)
Former A. James Clark School of Engineering Student Ambassador (2016 – 2017)

4418 Stadium Drive
College Park, MD 20742

scurtis@terpmail.umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Because I want to be able to have legal options in case a grad student's working conditions is not fair, although mine is.

Sincerely,

Saeed Hadadan
Graduate Assistant, CS Department
University of Maryland, College Park
4708 CHEROKEE ST, COLLEGE PARK, Prince Georges 20740-1874
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

For graduate employees, collective bargaining rights are necessary for a number of reasons. First, the problems facing graduate employees have persisted across generations of graduate students, legislators, and administrators. Over the last 20 years there have been numerous attempts to legalize collective bargaining rights for graduate employees, reversing the 2001 ban. Minimum stipends have hardly increased during that time. UMCP data shows pervasiveness of issues facing graduate employees.

Second, the current meet and confer process is not working. Despite the best efforts of graduate employee leaders, university administration has been largely unresponsive to graduate employee concerns and issues--issues like unlivable wages, unregulated hours, unclear job expectations, insufficient grievance procedures, workplace abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disproportionate rates of mental health issues, and more.

Personally as an international student from a third world country, it has been hard to balance expenditure and cost of living. For the hours of work we put in, it doesn't seem like we get fair pay and it has been hard to maintain savings account. We feel guilty spending on ourselves even if we deserve it.

I implore you to pass SB118 and legalize collective bargaining rights for Maryland's graduate employees now.

Sincerely,

Sahana Kumar
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
8150 Baltimore Avenue, College Park, MD 20740
skumar97@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining

Delores G. Kelley, Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2021

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

My name is Sai Kanth, I am a Ph.D. Candidate in Physics at the University of Maryland. Nearly four and a half years ago, I graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras, and I accepted an admission offer from the University of Maryland's highly reputed Department of Physics.

I came here knowing that I was far from being the first student from the best university in India to come to UMD for graduate school, and I will leave from here knowing that I am far from being the last one. At UMD, I have interacted with some of the best talent from across the globe. Although most of us are incredibly grateful for the research opportunities that UMD has provided us, we cannot help but be concerned about the lack of sufficient financial support for graduate students, and thereby a general disregard for our mental health and wellbeing.

Among all of the Big 10 schools, UMD pays its graduate assistants the least, relative to local cost of living. Given the incredibly expensive area that the DC Metro Area is, it is very difficult to manage a healthy living on our current stipend levels. Unless one lives right next to campus and doesn't need a car, has no medical expenses, has no student or other loans, spends very little on food, has plenty of family financial support, and has no other financial obligations or difficulties whatsoever, it is extremely difficult for one to not let financial distress affect one's mental health, on top of the stress that a Ph.D. already puts on one.

The lack of a sufficiently good public transportation system that works during the winter and summer, and beyond 5/6 PM each day (this is highly relevant given the long hours many of us have to spend in our labs), as well as the lack of affordable food options, puts on many of us an unhealthy amount of stress on a day-to-day basis. Unless one is willing to eat unhealthy fast food, it is essentially impossible to find a place around College Park where one can find a meal at a restaurant for under \$10. For comparison, many Big 10 schools that I've visited are located in lesser expensive areas, and food is relatively much more inexpensive. Not to mention the better pay in comparison to cost of living.

In essence, there is little to no room for error even in the best possible scenario, even with the best personal financial management skills. We are well aware of the fact that we are gaining access to education through this Ph.D., but we strongly believe that we shouldn't have to choose

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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between paying the bills and putting food on the table every single day.

Every graduate student friend that I have made here at UMD -- Americans and internationals alike -- struggle with this. Many of my American friends have student loans from their undergraduate to clear, and some even have families and kids to tend to. Among my fellow international students, many of us come from countries and families where we do not have much financial support. Doing a Ph.D. in today's fast-changing environment is incredibly difficult as it is, and the last thing that we as graduate students want to deal with is yet another source of stress and difficulty.

As many of my colleagues have said in their excellent testimonials, all that the graduate student body at UMD seeks is the right to bargain for a fair wage. It is a right that other employees of the State of Maryland deservedly possess, and it is one that we believe we deserve too, as the work that we do is incredibly important for the functioning and continuing success of the University System of Maryland.

Although we are paid for 20 hrs/wk during the semester and 40 hrs/wk during the summer, most of us work for far longer than that throughout the year. Last month, for example, my work averaged at around 55 hrs/wk. The fact of the matter is that we put in so much work not just for our own learning and success, but also so that our advisors can secure grants, and so that our department can continue to attract the best students and faculty.

It is my strong belief that a graduate student body that has its concerns truly heard and addressed can produce much better results for the University overall. It is my sincere hope that upon reading these testimonials, you will consider our reasonable request.

Sincerely,

Sai Kanth Dacha
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Physics
#2140, Kim Engineering Building,
8228 Paint Branch Drive, University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742.
Email: saikanth.dacha@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a GA at the University of Maryland. I love my school. I love my job. I love my education. And I would not be able to do this without the support of my family, specifically, my father, a retired federal employee and union president. I am incredibly privileged to have the financial support of my father because the graduate stipend IS NOT ENOUGH to live on, let alone pursue a degree.

I have been in my position since August, 2020. In March I was evacuated from the Peace Corps because of COVID. I came back to the U.S. with no job, no health insurance, and no housing. Fortunately, I had already applied and been accepted to UMD. Over the summer I survived on unemployment, my savings, and eventually a retail position.

My first semester, with tuition remission, I used the majority of my savings and Peace Corps settlement (\$7,500) to pay my student bill. This semester, I have had to ask my father to loan me money to cover the cost of my education. I get around \$720 a month from my graduate position. I spend \$300 on rent, leaving \$420 for groceries, car insurance, and everyday necessities.

Graduate students make sacrifice after sacrifice for their education. Right now, we have no one to turn to to advocate for us. Collective bargaining would mean that we are not alone. It would allow all graduate employees the opportunity to be heard. Together, we can pool our resources and create innovative solutions that serve the entire community.

I urge you to pass SB 118 because this is a long overdue measure. We deserve a voice. We deserve recognition. We deserve collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

Samantha Anne Porzel
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
1004 Fowler Street, Falls Church, VA 22046
sporzel@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I personally feel very lucky to be part of a fantastic group in a department that pays its graduate students well, however I know this is not the case for all departments. I have many friends who are currently or were previously part of UMD's graduate school and for those who were not in STEM they were paid significantly less for their TA positions. This was an additional hardship for them and grad school. Whether this should or should not be increased is besides the point. As of now the graduate students can not even collectively bargain for higher pay if they believe they deserve it. This is not the case for other similar employees at many universities and as a state institution it seems ridiculous that they would deny their employees so fundamental in this country.

Sincerely,

Samuel August Deitemyer
Research Assistant, PHYS
University of Maryland, College Park
3711 Campus Dr. , College Park, MD 20740
sdeitemyer@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

The mandatory fee each semester is a lot and I would like UMD to look into it please. The monthly stipend does not help

Sincerely,

SANCHITA CHUGH
Graduate Assistant, Division of Information technology
University of Maryland, College Park
8414 48th avenue, College park, MD 20740
sanchita.chugh94@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am an Administrative Assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park campus, and I wholeheartedly support SB0118. I am incredibly proud of my school and position in the School of Public Policy, and value the work I do in my office. Graduate assistants play critical roles in the research, academics, and administrative functioning of universities, but the University of Maryland takes advantage of graduate assistants, using them in place of hiring real staff while denying us the rights of full employees.

While I take pride in the work I do in my position, there are currently five graduate assistants (including myself) in my office, with only one staff member to provide services to thousands of students. The university uses us as a stop-gap measure to delay hiring the additional staff who's roles we fill. Meanwhile, we do not receive enough salary to even pay our rent. As a mid-career adult who left the workforce to get my higher degree, if I did not have the luxury of having a savings account (which the majority of graduate assistants do not), I would never be able to make a living. The compensation we receive could possibly suffice for an undergraduate student, but not for adults with mortgages, children, debts, and life expenses to pay.

I support SB0118 and the right for graduate assistants to collectively bargain for fair wages and equitable treatment as employees of the University of Maryland. I implore the committee members to support this bill and workers rights for graduate students in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Sarah Campbell
Graduate Assistant, School of Public Policy
University of Maryland, College Park
13011 Twinbrook Pkwy , Rockville, MD 20851
scampb93@umd.edu

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

It appears to be a very simple matter. Graduate Assistants (GA) perform work and are paid by the University of Maryland (UMD). This instance of a relationship between employer (e.g. UMD) and employee (e.g. GA) should not be exempt from the crucial laws put in place for every other type of occupation in the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Sean Dungan
University of Maryland, College Park
4356 Stadium Dr., College Park, Maryland 20742
seanydungan@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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Supporting

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

My name is Sergio Pinto and I am PhD candidate at the School of Public Policy. Throughout my doctoral program, I have been a Research and/or Teaching assistant with the University of Maryland.

I am privileged enough that, having worked prior to the beginning of my PhD, I had accumulated savings that meant that I was not as reliant on the graduate stipends provided by the University. However, many graduate students are, and in those cases it is a permanent source of stress that the University does not provide livable wages and that it consistently opposes our right to organize.

I study public policy and, at this point, there is a large amount of research pointing to the positive effects of collective bargaining, particularly in a country as unequal as the United States. It is also clear that those benefits flow primarily to the workers in the most vulnerable positions; given society's structural inequalities, that often means women and people of color benefit the most from being protected by collective bargaining.

It is not only about wages, either. The right to collectively organize would also afford graduate students more resources to counter retaliatory workplace practices and workplace harassment - while I was fortunate enough to never experience either personally, I know other graduate students who did and who were caught in a position where they had no power. In short, for anyone concerned with gender and racial justice, there should be no hesitation: allowing students to organize if they wish to do so would foster those goals.

Sincerely,

Sergio Tiago Barreiras Pereira Pinto
Graduate Student, School of Public Policy
University of Maryland, College Park
1403 Meridian Place NW, Washington, DC 20010
stpinto@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

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

I need some more help as a TA at UMD and more appreciation for the work. I wish to have a raise in the pay which makes my life easier especially during summer terms.

Sincerely,

Sharmila duppala
Teaching Assistant, Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
Iribe Center, UMD, College Park, Maryland 20740

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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

The lack of collective bargaining rights at UMD has left many students in untenable circumstances, including squalid living conditions and unclear or even abusive work environments. The financial and emotional strain caused by our lack of rights and protections has very real results, like poor mental and physical health, debt, and inability to finish our programs. As a developmentalist, I also know that these factors can not only negatively affect the quality of our current and future work, but can have lifelong consequences for our health and well-being. Please allow us to advocate for ourselves.

Sincerely,

Sharon Alexa McDorman
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
7915 Eastern Avenue Northwest, Silver Spring, MD 20910
s.alexamcdorman@gmail.com

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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Supporting

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

I believe the graduate assistants' salaries in University of Maryland system deserve a raise considering the hard work and high living expenses around DC. Also, although PhD students like me get a stipend for the tuition and living expenses, we still end up paying international student fee, mandatory fee and part of insurance every semester, which is an extra \$1000 bill.

Sincerely,

Shuke Li
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
3404 Tulane Dr, Apt 13, Hyattsville, MD 20783

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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

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Supporting

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

As a supervisor of graduate teaching assistants and as an advisor to graduate students, I strongly believe that graduate students should have the right to collectively bargain. They deserve the same rights as other university workers, as they are providing labor essential to the university's operations.

Sincerely,

Siv B. Lie
Faculty, School of Music
University of Maryland, College Park
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sivblie@gmail.com

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

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

The University System of Maryland cannot function without the labor of its graduate assistants. They represent an irreplaceable component not only of USM research activities and personnel, but also of undergraduate instruction as well. With their knowledge, expertise, and labor value, graduate assistants are an irreplaceable asset for the University System of Maryland. However, denying them the right to collectively bargain not only disenfranchises them, it also dehumanises them, stripping from them their agency and their ability to fairly negotiate the terms of their employment, a right that the very foundations of labor and capital in the modern world were built on. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this lack of agency is not only financially risky, but represents a real danger to graduate assistants: By denying them full employment status and their right to collective bargaining, the state of Maryland has signalled that these irreplaceable young people are not only undeserving of true employment, but are undeserving of their health and safety. The only ethical choice for the State and University System of Maryland is to allow graduate assistants the right to collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

Sophia Relph
Graduate Assistant, Department of Mechanical Engineering
University of Maryland, College Park
9309 Ewing Dr, Bethesda, MD 20817
sophrelph@gmail.com

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

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Supporting

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

I am a PhD candidate currently in my third year. I would like to express my support for collective bargaining rights. As PhD students, we are expected to focus on our education, develop our skills as a scientists, while simultaneously delivering on our research goals. While I enjoy my work as a graduate student, I am dismayed by the fact that we are not supported enough financially. Housing and living expenses in College Park are unnaturally high. I currently pay more than half of what I earn in a month on rent alone, for a single bedroom in a shared house. I strongly feel that the income we receive as research students should be adjusted to allow us to live and work comfortably. Furthermore, as an international student, I have no safety net in terms of family or close friends that live in this country. Unlike others, international students like me who earn their stipend as a graduate assistant cannot work part-time jobs to improve their finances. Therefore, we have to manage with meager savings throughout our PhD career. I love my research field and the work I am able to do. But I am always anxious about the costs of living here, which adds to the pressure of completing our work and research goals. If the university truly believes in and appreciates the work put in by its graduate students, it should afford them the ability to bargain for their well being.

Sincerely,

Srinivasan Abhishek Kalpattu
Graduate Student, Department of Materials Science and Engineering
University of Maryland, College Park
8125 48th Ave, College Park , Maryland 20740
4bhish3k17@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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Supporting

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

I personally experienced the benefits of graduate student collective bargaining agreements when I was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison many years ago in a situation with many similarities to the situation at the University of Maryland system. The need for a union is manyfold from job protections to benefits. Without the union, the graduate students who are degreed professionals - have undergraduate degrees and perform work which supports the teaching and research carried on at the university, would have had less pay, might not have had a tuition remission, would have had fewer health benefits, and would not have had employment protections. For example, I was bullied by a high level university official (in a university research institute, position below the level of a dean) and the university was intransigently protecting him but union involvement, and nothing short of union involvement, was able to force the university to make him retract his threat although the university still never penalized him. Graduate students at every university face unfair difficulties and can benefit from the power of collective bargaining, and most universities and university systems don't want to yield their complete control, arguing that the students who are actual performing some of the work of the university are not employees. This is an ages old problem and the legislation is needed to force the hand in order to protect vulnerable workers who face a total power imbalance against an employer who holds all the cards that affect both their working conditions and terms and their future opportunities and careers.

Sincerely,

Stephen Jascourt

3527 Toddsbury Ln, Olney, MD 20832
jascourt@umich.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of SB 658 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. As a large part of the University's workforce, I would like to see the University grant us the same rights as other workers within the University. From my vantage point, not having the same rights as other workers within the University is a method of devaluing our work and contributions to the University. Instead of being told that we are valued in a letter, I would like these sentiments to be evidenced in the University's actions.

Sincerely,

Sydney Triola

Ph.D., Department of Information Studies, UMCP

Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant

3407 Tulane Dr.,

Apt. 23

Hyattsville, MD 20783

Sydneymtriola@gmail.com

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Graduate Assistants end up working far more than 20+ hours because it takes much longer time to grade assignments and examinations. Too many students enrolled in a semester. A few GAs are hired. The semester span is the same. The deadline for completing the grading of assignments and exams is compressed / expedited. Implies, working long hours (more than 20+) to finish grading assignments and exams quickly.

Sincerely,

Syed Neyaz Ahmed

11661 Stoneview Square, Reston, Virginia 20191

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

The present system does not take into account the expenses of time, money, and spirit in order to pursue a graduate degree at the University of Maryland. One the essence of time, many student have to work extremely long hours to meet the deadlines their advisors and themselves set. The main issue at hand is understanding how long certain task will take. The length of time expected by the student is largely underestimated leading to stress. The expense of time and the incurrence of stress is only troubled more so by the cost. For some, the cost of not an issue. The graduate school, for those students fortunate to have complete tuitions remission, does well to provide students with the opportunity to explore the course work they so desire.

However, there are several rules that are simply arcane and or detrimental to the student. For example, my graduate research assistance-ship allocates me i believe 12 or 10 graduate credits covered per semester. However, the ludicrous fact is that if i were to take 9 credits or more, i pay mandatory fees per semester of \$800-\$850 while if i take 8 credit or less the mandatory fees are around \$450. Why is there such a drastic uptick of cost of mandatory fees? i have read the mandatory fees and although i agree with them in the way that it is myself and other supporting the many services UMD has to offer but i feel i am not getting my fare part when i decide to take 3 three credit course and am hit with \$800+ mandatory fee where as if I just could drop 1 credit id reduce that cost by nearly half.

On the topic of expense, the collective bargaining agreement is important also for transportation and parking. Some graduate student live off campus and therefore need to commute to UMD. Im not sure what others believe but i think the cost of parking for graduate students should be 0\$. WE should be provided a parking space along with our Assistance ship. At least, this decision for a "free" parking pass while "employed" should be addressed for graduate student. This is even more imperative in the day of COVID where carpooling is a risk for any individual in the car. Also, because of this many of my lab mates were bombarded with parking tickets for parking in the wrong spot on campus, performing our necessary duties as graduate students, while the campus is seeing probably only or less than 10% of the traffic it would see during a normal semester.

Finally, id like to end on spirit. The spirit of UMD is community. We are TERPS. We want to support one another within the community and just outside of it by our research and our own extracurriculars. The spirit is damaged if graduate students are not allowed to act as a community

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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as a whole. For this reason and the others outline above, i am submitting testimony of my support for this petition.

Sincerely,

Taylor Francis Schulden
Research Assistant, Department of Plant and Landscape Science
University of Maryland, College Park
3405 Dillon St., Baltimore, MD 21224
tschulde@terpmail.umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

My name is Theresa Menna. I am in the midst of my first year in a PhD program in the College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences, and I am writing to implore you to support collective bargaining rights for graduate workers.

There were two things that shocked me about becoming a graduate assistant at the University of Maryland this past year. The first was my own salary. When I began to look for housing options in the College Park area, I realized very quickly that my salary of roughly \$29,500 (pre-taxes and student fees, which amount to a few thousand dollars altogether) would not be nearly enough to support single living. What it does manage to cover is the cost of surviving -- if you are willing to sacrifice some basic independence. I was a researcher at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for three years, and a full-time teacher the year before that. I have now left the work force to pursue a PhD at 26-years-old. I believe strongly in the work I am doing at UMD, as well as the future work I will do with my education here. However, it is quite demoralizing to realize that my university does not value me the same way. Under current circumstances, I will be rationing my grocery runs and living with roommates until the age of 31.

The second thing that shocked me to my core when I learned it this year is that my salary of \$29,500 is a luxury. There are graduate assistants in other colleges at UMD that make as low as \$21,000. I have struggled to wrap my head around this number. How does it make any sense? We may be in different colleges, but we earn our salaries doing the same things -- leading classrooms, teaching, performing important research, and more. If graduate assistant salaries are meant to (at the very least) cover the cost of living in and around College Park, then how can there be such an enormous discrepancy between departments in salary? And if even the "highest" salaries barely cover the cost of living in Maryland, then what can the students on the lowest end of that spectrum be expected to do?

It is for all of these reasons and many more that I strongly, firmly support graduate students' right to collective bargaining. It will allow graduate workers to make real, tangible, positive change regarding their working conditions, and these changes could directly result in safer housing and securer access to food for thousands of workers. Regardless of student status, we are paid workers and should receive bargaining rights as such. Please do the right thing and support this bill.

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Sincerely,

Theresa Menna
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
6200 Westchester Park Dr. #1715, College Park, MD 20740
theresa.n.menna@gmail.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I am a graduate student at UMD-College Park because i wanted to further my education in the field of education. my purpose is to dismantle systemic inequities in the education system in the U.S. I am also a graduate assistant for the university because it helps with the expensive tuition for graduate school. unfortunately, i am struggling financially—consistently—due to the low pay for graduate assistants. graduate assistants are not taken seriously, are seen as replaceable, and are severely underpaid. we are employees of the university of maryland system like other staff and faculty. we have lives, families, children, and responsibilities as well. we are people trying to live and contribute to society while we are in graduate school. we deserve the right to collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

Tierra Merritt
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
8715 1st Ave, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
tmerritt@uwalumni.com

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

My name is Tifanee McCaskill. I am a second year PhD student in the Urban Education specialization for the Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership program at UMD. I am also a teaching assistant and research assistant working 20 hours a week who, like many others, is providing testimony to this committee.

In this current economy, graduate assistants are not being paid a living wage. In order to produce outstanding scholarship in addition to assisting the work of the excellent instructors and researchers at College Park, we must be compensated reasonably. If College Park intends on remaining an institution known for supporting equitable treatment for everyone, they must consider equitable compensation for all workers, including Graduate Assistants. As a Black woman, I will only continue to give my time and effort to a school that honors me for what I am worth. If College Park wants to remain an attractive destination for the next generation of Black scholars, then it should take a stand and support any improvement in the working conditions of graduate students. The time is always right to do what is right. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tifanee McCaskill
Teaching Assistant, School of Education
University of Maryland, College Park
220 Linden Ave, Towson, MD 21286
tifaneem@umd.edu

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I have been with the University of Maryland for one semester now during which time I've worked as a teaching assistant. I spend my time grading assignments and teaching students course material. When I'm not officially working as a teaching assistant I spend my time primarily doing research with my advisor, developing algorithms to solve fundamental problems in the field of computational biology. I like my job, and the reason I support SB118 is precisely that: because it is a job.

Detractors of the right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain tend to argue that it would be bad for graduate workers and for the university system if graduate workers decided to form a collective bargaining unit. That claim may or may not be true, but it's not salient to the issue of whether graduate assistants should have the right to collectively bargain under state law should they choose to do so. Rather, the basic question is just whether graduate assistants are working for the university. The answer is obviously yes.

Prior to coming to Maryland I worked at another university as a research assistant. My day-to-day life in that job was substantially similar to that of my day-to-day life as a graduate assistant, except now I am responsible for teaching the many undergraduates who come to UMD for its nationally-renowned computer science education. It's true that I often learn things in the course of my work-day but, contrary to the university's prior testimony, this does not mean that my job is primarily a part of my education. Rather, me showing up and completing my obligations are essential to providing undergraduates at UMD an education.

Further, the work I and other GAs do in research not only helps to bring in millions of dollars in grant money to the university system every year, but also furthers one of the core missions of UMD: to do groundbreaking research. Without graduate assistants the research that UMD is known for would not be possible. Ask any faculty and they'll tell you the same.

Graduate assistants are workers, and workers deserve the right to collectively bargain. I strongly encourage the legislature to join 48 other states in recognizing this plain fact.

Sincerely,

Tobias Janssen

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
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Teaching Assistant, Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland, College Park
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Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

I believe that income of graduate assistant should rise to minimize inequality and income deficit.

Sincerely,

Uday Saha
Research Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Delores G. Kelley, Chair

SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

Supporting

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I write today urging you to support SB 118, which would provide graduate students at the University of Maryland and within the rest of the University System of Maryland the right to organize and collectively bargain. My colleagues and I have no grievance procedure, no HR channels through which to work, and no recourse to address basic inequalities. We can not take sick days or to refuse requests from supervisors and administrators that could endanger our health and safety or that of our colleagues, for fear refusal would lead to punitive measures, including the loss of our funding and an early end to our studies.

This situation has been brought into stark relief during this time of global pandemic, when many of my colleagues are being asked to continue in-person teaching, data collection, and fieldwork without clear guidance and resources from the university. Although many of us have concerns about our health and safety, we must continue to perform these duties for fear of losing our positions in our programs. Many of us have had our personal research delayed by months or years due to the pandemic and some have had their basic subsistence threatened by funding cuts, but we have no channels through which to petition the university for support as grants, fellowships, and other funding sources are paused or reduced during the pandemic. We continue working with the knowledge that, despite demanding these services from us, the university will not reimburse us for medical bills or lost wages should we become ill or need to be hospitalized.

We have all chosen to pursue our graduate studies with and contribute our talents and labors to the University System of Maryland, passing over other opportunities elsewhere, and we are proud of what we provide to the State, our Universities, and our programs. 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 for working conditions that protect our health and safety. Again, I urge lawmakers to support SB 118, 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.

Valerie Hall

PhD Student, Anthropology

Teaching Assistant

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Simply put, prohibiting graduate student employee's collective bargaining rights is an outdated and inequitable practice that does not reflect the values of the state of Maryland or the universities within it. Our state, and our country at large, purport to protect laborers—instituting protections for vulnerable groups (such as children), and making clear anti-discrimination practices. Furthermore, in the U.S., employees of the state must be granted certain rights, including the right to collectively bargain.

How, then, is it sensible to exclude graduate assistants from fair labor standards? My paycheck lists me as an employee. I have subsidized health insurance as an employee. I am paid as an employee. And yet, I am not protected as an employee.

This outdated practice excuses inequity by exploiting the precarious position graduate assistant employees already face: to be both student and employee of the university.

This position should not justify the prohibition of collective bargaining but should make necessary the immense need to protect an already vulnerable population. The minimum required stipend for graduate students at the University of Maryland is nearly 50% lower than the cost of living for a single adult living near College Park, Maryland. We rest at the bottom of the totem pole compared to all other Big 10 Universities.

And yet, we find ourselves at risk and unprotected by labor standards guaranteed to state employees.

The great state of Maryland values its workers, and I believe that most of our legislators want to uphold fair labor standards. If my belief is correctly placed in my representatives, the only logical next step to pass this policy guaranteeing graduate assistant employees like me collective bargaining rights.

It is high time our state policy aligns with our values of fair labor standards for graduate student employees.

Sincerely,

Support for Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining
Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

Victoria Ledford

ABD Doctoral Candidate of Communication, Instructor of Record, Graduate Research &
Teaching Assistant, Department of Communication

University of Maryland, College Park

2130 Skinner Building, Department of Communication, University of Maryland, College Park,
MD 20742

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Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Something has to be changed. It is unfair for students who work not to have collective bargaining rights. Students are the future of the country, and they are treated poorly. Graduate students who actually need to be privileged are hiving the lowest wages in the state. Have you tried to live on 21000 per year for six years, paying different student fees out of pocket? You can't collect money for the future, you can't buy a car, you can't live alone in an apartment (it is expensive nowadays, yes). That is all you can have because you can't take a second job in grad school. Studying, doing research, and being a teacher assistant takes all your time. Isn't it depressing that you can't grow financially? And now, imagine you have to do all that during the global pandemic that goes for years.

Sincerely,

Vladimir Butyrkin
Graduate Assistant, Natural Sciences
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SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My previous employment at the University of Illinois supports collective bargain.

We graduate students shall have rights to bargain with the employer to get more of our rights and preserve better living conditions especially when the inflation rate is staggeringly high.

Sincerely,

Weiye Chen
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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iweiyechen@outlook.com

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

I am from the DC area, and before I enrolled I made sure that I had one of the lowest cost living situations possible so I would not be further burdened while in grad school. Despite these precautions, I have had to find supplementary income during the course of my graduate school to be able to maintain my (low) standard of living. I support collective bargaining rights, and cost of living adjustments to respect the necessary conditions for effective scholarship.

Sincerely,

Will Bien Duggan
Graduate Assistant, Department of Urban Studies and Regional Planning
University of Maryland, College Park
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Graduate students should have a chance to collectively bargain and have their voices heard by state and university officials. Too many decisions that directly affect us are made without any input from us. Graduate students deserve to be paid a living wage in the communities we live in and it is time that we get a chance to collectively bargain to ensure that this happens. We help keep universities up and running through our teaching and research and it is unacceptable that students are unable to pay their bills, while having little to no recourse to change this reality.

Sincerely,

William Bishop
Graduate Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
7408 Tilden Street, Landover Hills, Maryland 20784
wbishop@umd.edu

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Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
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SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

The average living cost in college park area is much higher than I expected. The rent is so high and therefore paying for my living space is burdensome considering the current stipend rate. To prevent any unwanted distracting caused by low income but high living cost, I definitely agree that the financial aid for graduate assistants should be increased.

Sincerely,

Wu-Joo Daniel Lee
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

From last year, I only have \$15000 after tax to spend. And more than half of it have been contributing to my rent. There is really minimum, minimum money for us to spend on our daily expense. We have been living a life as a minimum wage person in the Maryland let alone the fact that I have a house-wife that I have to feed during the pandemic. I really wish we could get more support from the government level. As a Marylander, I have been paying my tax on time, I do wish there is some help, any help from the government level to us graduate assistant. I have seen so much Ph.D. student leaving their study for work, because it is really hard to sustain their life on campus.

Sincerely,

Xiaomin Lin
Teaching Assistant, Electrical and Computer Engineering.
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

We are working and producing research. There is no reason why we should not be recognised as employers.

Sincerely,

Xiaozhen Fu
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
5015 Blackfoot Pl, College Park, Maryland 20740
xz1@umd.edu

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

SB 118
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Graduate assistant's salary is too low compared with my responsibility and life expense in this area (DMV), even after the improvement at the beginning of 2022 made by UMCP.

Sincerely,

Xiyang Wy
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I strongly support the status of graduate workers to be classified as employees and the collective bargaining rights that comes with it. The most important task of a graduate student should always be his/her coursework and thesis research. A graduate assistantship is often the only source of income supporting this crucial period of career development.

I speak as an international student at the Dept. of Mathematics at the University of Maryland. The vast majority of graduate students in our program rely solely on the income from teaching assistantship to be able to afford rent among other living costs in College Park. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly complicated the work condition even with teaching completely online. The online environment has increased the teaching load significantly, both in adjustment to new platforms and format, and an increasing amount of assignments and greater responsibility to engage the students in the online setting. Furthermore, the graduate students are often not themselves the sole instructor, they are subject to long and frequent class meetings at the requirement of lecturers and course chairs. Without collective bargaining rights, the department will never put graduate students in any sort of priority, the graduate assistants are at the mercy of arbitrarily varying workload and unclear specification of responsibilities.

The lack of control on teaching workload have also enabled the university to hire much less GAs with lower salary compared to many other public universities. Recently the Dept. of Mathematics have implemented sudden changed the policy on support for those who have been in program for 7+ years (average length of degree is actually 6.5 years in MATH). This cruel and arbitrary decision in the middle of a global pandemic jeopardized my own assistantship position and several of my colleagues have lost their support.

Sincerely,

Xuesen Na
Graduate Assistant, Department of Mathematics
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SB 118

Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair

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3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am a graduate student and graduate research assistant at the University of Maryland. I write to you today to urge your support on SB 118.

I support this bill because collective bargaining operates as an effective means to address cost of living and employment concerns. In absence of these rights, student employees are unable to formally and bindingly negotiate with the university to address labor and employment issues.

UMD's minimum graduate assistant stipend is lower than every single flagship campus except for the University of Nebraska, when compared with estimated cost of living. My fellow students and I are struggling under severe financial stress while fulfilling our study and work tasks.

If you have any further questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact me at yhao@umd.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Yeming Hao

Graduate Research Assistant & PhD Candidate

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University of Maryland

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

Sometimes we end up doing more work than required even if we exceed our hours. We are required to fulfill those delivery dates even during midterms and finals.

Sincerely,

Zam Mozumder
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University of Maryland, College Park
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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

The wage is not livable. With limited budget, I cannot fully function in my position. We need our rights to speak up about our living conditions and by doing that we can better serve as students, assistants and researchers.

Sincerely,

Zexuan Zhao
Teaching Assistant
University of Maryland, College Park
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Previous Testimony from Legislative Sessions 2020-2022

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

SB 118
Supporting

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

Employees should have rights to bargain for what they believe they deserve. Being a student or working for a state-owned institute does not make it an exception. Employers should listen to their employees' voices, not only for the well-being of employees, but also for their own sake. Because working efficiency, especially for creative types of work, comes from satisfying working conditions. I believe what the University of Maryland has done in building a healthy relationship between the school and GAs are far from satisfying. I heard complains about low salaries and high home rent in the DC area. Our mandatory fees, which a lot of schools do not have, are not included in the tuition remission. That means over \$1,600 a year if you register for over 8 credits every semester (which is a requirement in our department). I could hardly make ends meet at the beginning of every semester. Life as a PhD student is stressful, and financial burdens make the experience worse. As an International student, there are much less financial aids for us as most of them only target domestic students. Without bargaining rights, there is no way but silently suffer or just, leave. Many of the essential work in the school are done by GAs. University of Maryland has always been seeking to provide high quality teaching, part of which is provided or supported by GAs. Our research ranking achieves the highest in the history, which cannot be achieved without those hard working research assistants. If high quality education and research are still of high priority in the university, the voice of the GAs should be heard, to enlarge our community, and to make every one of us comfortably work towards a higher goal.

Sincerely,

Zipei Lu
Graduate Assistant
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