

Chairmen of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Lucker. I am a 5th year PhD student. I have provided written testimony twice in the past. The University System of Maryland and other parties not in favor of this bill will tell you that everything is well and that collective bargaining is not worth the trouble. I am here as a member of GLU, a member of the GSG, a member of GAAC (the Meet and Confer process at the University of Maryland), and most importantly as myself, that this is unfortunately not the case.

All three graduate student organizations that I have mentioned have come out in support of this bill. This has not been just this year, but they have been in favor for a long while, many even pre-pandemic! Over the past year, GLU has increased its union card count from around 50% support to OVER 70% support. It is apparent that graduate students at this university WANT this bill, and in many cases NEED this bill to pass!! This bill is crucial to the proper function of graduate assistantships, especially Teaching Assistantships, as well as the MENTAL HEALTH of all graduate assistants.

I joined GAAC last year in January (a bit over a year ago). I was a junior member last spring, where GAAC had around 15 or so members, including graduate students from across campus along with the Dean of the Graduate School (Dean Roth), the Provost (Provost Rice), and the Vice President of Administrative Affairs. We started with about 12 graduate students at the start of the spring semester, and ended with 4 active members by the end of the spring semester. These 4 members have been trying to increase involvement while navigating the world of higher level administration. It is important to note that only one member was NOT a new member that spring semester. We have been trying, and I personally have not given up hope, but it is apparent that the Meet and Confer process is unfortunately not balanced in our favor.

The story of how I got involved in all of these organizations is a rough one. I started as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry my first year. I was told that I had to grade 80 lab reports, hold 2-4 hours of office hours per week in which I had as many as 30, or even 50, people in my Zoom room. I also answered emails for students, answered discussion boards for students, and went to weekly TA meetings where we discussed how to manage 500+ students for 10 TAs, many of whom were undergraduate students and so the graduate students picked up most of the work. There was no clear direction from the department or instructors. I expressed my DETERIORATING MENTAL HEALTH the second semester, as I was on the verge of weekly mental breakdowns, and was then let go of my TAship the following year.

I have been fortunate to find a TAship in other departments. Unfortunately, my troubles did not end there! Recently, I have had multiple issues with health insurance and HR at the university. In the Fall of 2023, I switched from Student Health Insurance to Employee Health insurance that summer to start that August. At least, I thought I had and this was confirmed by the university. However, in Mid-October when I contacted the university due to issues related to this, they said that I would not get health insurance that fall AT ALL. BUT that I could pay FULL PRICE for the Student Health insurance for that semester, which would now only encompass two months! I have had more issues related to health insurance due to switching departments every semester for my TAships, and instead of working with me, HR has been so gracious to send me a CEASE AND DESIST, active for ALL OF UHR! I am fortunate that the Division of Student Affairs has graciously agreed to take over for HR and all employee matters for me.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, it is the UNFORTUNATE FACT that the Meet and Confer Process is not working at the University of Maryland. I have not given up hope for this, and we are working with Dean Roth who has been relatively responsive. HOWEVER, the Meet and Confer Process has NOT WORKED, especially for me given my personal issues above, none of which has been properly resolved. I continue to face issues to this day. I have been fortunate enough to find faculty and administration to listen to my concerns and try to help me navigate this! But the university can, and has, all ability to ignore our concerns and important matters. Collective bargaining rights would bring these pertinent issues directly to the administration in a COLLABORATIVE setting, and level the playing field so that we, the Graduate students, can address our concerns as colleagues rather than lesser workers.

I hope this helps the committee understand our situation, and I submit this testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of this bill.

**Joshua Lucker**

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\*Note: I emailed back in August in support of this Bill, but was not informed of the hearing until yesterday, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2025. This should explain my 'late' testimony.\*