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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing in support of HB214 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. As a history PhD student, I look to the past to understand the present, and to understand the situation with graduate student we need to look at its origins. The graduate school model is based upon the apprenticeship/master model of the middle ages. According to this model, an apprentice is assigned to a master craftsman and performs labor in exchange for knowledge of the craft. After a time, the apprentice would graduate to journeyman, still working under the master for a number of years, until he was deemed worthy to become a master himself. Despite the grueling and often unpaid labor required from the apprentice, this system worked because at the end of process apprentices were almost guaranteed to economic security. And so did academia for a time, but that is not the case anymore, and that is one of the main reasons we are currently seeing such a push towards collective bargaining for grad students.

While graduate student labor has become more exploitative in recent decades, the situation has been worsened by the fact that graduate workers no longer can expect to rise to the tops of their professions after their degree completion. In the last few decades, higher education (particularly the arts and humanities) has been decimated. The job prospects for much of academia plummeted as tenured-faculty positions have been slashed. Gone are the days of when an academic job meant security and a high standard of living. For many, even the prospect of a job in their field is increasingly out of their grasp. And that is why we are seeing such a push toward graduate student collective bargaining. The bargain has become unfair and graduate students are no longer willing to put up with the insecurity, mistreatment, poverty, and powerlessness for the majority of their young adult years while training for a career that might never come.

While for many graduate workers this is a deeply personal issue, the exploitation of graduate labor is also part the larger problem affecting colleges and universities. In order to cut tenured positions, more and more labor has been shifted to low-paid and over-worked contingency faculty and graduate workers. The exploitation of graduate workers is not an accident, but an essential part of the neoliberalization of academia. Not only are graduate workers being exploited but universities are making us unwilling participants in our own exploitation and career destruction.

Something needs to be done to reverse the declining trajectory of higher education. The first step in that process is to accurately classify graduate workers as workers and allow us the right to advocate for ourselves through collective bargaining by passing HB214 Graduate Assistant

Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. Only then will we have the tools necessary to begin to fight for economic justice and security for ourselves and have any hope of stemming the tide of exploitation in higher education.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Dunphy  
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Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
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Annapolis, MD 21401

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Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations 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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PhD Student, Computer Science  
Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
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HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a PhD Candidate in the Department of American Studies and Graduate Assistant at University of Maryland, College Park, I am urging you to pass HB0214. We are workers and deserve to be afforded the right to collectively bargain to ensure work with dignity on Maryland's campuses.

UMD promotes itself as a place of "fearless ideas," but the denial of this human right to collectively bargain creates an atmosphere where graduate workers fear speaking up about low-wages, large teaching loads, and unclear and uneven contracts for fear of reprisals. We are officially told that we are not allowed to work outside the university, because our stipends (for the work we do) are granted to us to cover our living expenses so we can focus full-time on our studies. It is never enough. I have always had to work another job to pay my bills and even then I have often had to use credit cards to make up the difference. I am decidedly poorer and more in debt since I came to graduate school. Instead of nurturing the development of emerging scholars and educators, poor working conditions make it challenging for graduate students to focus on their studies. There are wide discrepancies in graduate students' work loads across departments and little transparency around these decisions. In my department, graduate students have often been required to be the primary instructors for undergraduate classes. When graduate students complain about the work-load, we are often told to spend as little time as possible on teaching. This seems incredibly unfair to undergraduate students who are paying and taking out loans to come to Maryland's flagship school to receive what they hope is an excellent education.

HB0214 is not simply about the working conditions of graduate students, but about the educational integrity of UMD. I hope you will seriously consider this matter.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hufnagel  
PhD Candidate, Department of American Studies  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
3008 Ellerslie Ave.,  
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ahufnage@umd.edu

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing in support of collective bargaining rights for graduate employees, and I strongly urge you to pass HB0214.

The right to collectively bargain is a well-established right, and one that should be available to all workers. In the case of graduate workers, however, this right has been denied by the University of Maryland on the grounds that graduate workers are not employees, but rather students in an apprenticeship system. There are a number of problems with this argument.

First, just because someone is an apprentice doesn't mean they can't be paid a living wage.

Second, working conditions are learning conditions: if the people conducting research and teaching courses are unable to make a living, then the university's ability to produce new research and educate students is severely compromised. Since universities are engines of economic growth, we are effectively wasting our own money if we don't allow universities to operate at their full potential. And yet, this is exactly what we do when we deny labor rights to graduate employees.

Third, the basic facts of graduate work contradict the notion that graduate employees are apprentices. Many graduate employees do not work in academic departments, but instead work as administrative assistants in non-academic departments in the university; they are not apprenticing in their own academic disciplines, but rather working at low-paying jobs to make ends meet while they take courses and conduct research. Furthermore, because universities are no longer hiring many tenure-track faculty, the jobs for which graduate students are "apprenticing" are now largely non-existent. Indeed, 75% of university faculty nationwide (and 66% at the University of Maryland) are now "adjunct" labor: part-time teaching faculty who do not receive a regular income or benefits. As a result, the majority of graduate employees will not be able to find work in a university system upon earning an advanced degree, and hence cannot be considered apprentices. They are, in fact, employees who frequently do not work in their chosen fields when they are students, and are unlikely to work in their chosen fields upon earning their degrees.

Fourth, many graduate students feel that they have no workplace rights at all without the right to collectively bargain. This is because, in many cases, the person who supervises their employment also supervises their scholarship. Hence, graduate workers often feel they must agree to unreasonable employment demands simply to earn a degree. This is not apprenticeship; it is exploitation.

For these reasons, I ask you to end our unjust system of labor exploitation by supporting HB0214. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Asim A. Ali,  
Ph.D.

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Brian Sarginger. I am a 6<sup>th</sup> year PhD Candidate in the field of History writing my 3<sup>rd</sup> testimony in favor of collective bargaining rights for graduate student workers. In my time at the University of Maryland, I have filled many roles as a graduate assistant, a teaching assistant, and now, an instructor of record. These roles have given me a great deal of appreciation for the kind of work done by graduate student workers and how they help the university fulfill its stated purpose in educating those who attend. It has also given me a much greater appreciation for the protections that we lack. Often, our roles are ill-defined with limited formal resources and support for how exactly we are supposed to fulfill our obligations as workers with limited protections and requirements made clear to us, our supervisors, and our departments. All too often, our system of work relies on the beneficence or intervention of individual faculty or administrators, leaving many of our workplace issues subject to random chance for correction. Collective bargaining would provide an opportunity for graduate student workers to address these systemic difficulties with collective action rather than individual pleading.

Beyond formalizing our roles and duties as graduate student workers, collective bargaining would allow graduate student workers to confront other social issues facing them. These topics range from sick leave, to poverty, to job precarity, to housing, to family leave, to childcare. Graduate students face a combination of these issues every day with nothing more than the occasional workshop or piece of advice. Collective bargaining provides an opportunity for graduate students to organize around these issues and work with the administration at UMD in a formal, legally enforceable system. Collective bargaining for graduate student workers is not an unreasonable demand for the individuals who grade exams, teach classes, facilitate administrative work, and generally provide integral support for our University.

Sincerely,

Brian R. Sarginger  
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Teaching Assistant Hist 208C  
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bsarginger@gmail.com

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Brice Bowrey and I am a graduate student at the University of Maryland – College Park. I am writing to you to express my support for HB214. I believe that this bill, and the collective bargaining that it enables, is the surest way to improve the quality of life of graduate students. Furthermore, I believe HB214 will ensure that graduate students are adequately and fairly compensated for the services, skills, and work that they provide to the University of Maryland system. In my opinion, graduate students are as essential to the functioning of the University as professors, administrators, or any other members of the faculty and staff. However, graduate students are often unable to financially support themselves as they pursue their studies. The cost of living in the DMV area is high and rising, while salaries and other forms of compensation have remained the same or declined. Thus, many graduate students are forced to work multiple jobs or extreme hours in order to stay afloat.

I believe that this situation is untenable. The conditions under which graduate students currently work negatively impact the undergraduate students of the University of Maryland system by diminishing graduate teaching assistant's ability to provide quality education and academic support. Furthermore, without sufficient time and financial means, graduate students cannot conduct the research which will improve the community and the nation in the years to come. History shows that collective bargaining is one of the surest ways to improve working conditions in a fair and mutually beneficial manner. Thus, I urge you to support HB214 and grant graduate students the right to negotiate for adequate compensation and fair working conditions.

Sincerely,

Brice Bowrey  
History PhD, Department of History  
Graduate Fellow  
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blbowrey@gmail.com

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a PhD candidate in history and University of Maryland teaching assistant, I am writing in support of HB 214. When I first entered the history department at the University of Maryland three years ago, I was caught off guard by the poor working conditions of graduate workers. While our work makes the University of Maryland a top institution of higher learning and ensures that student achieve positive learning outcomes, 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.

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 and meeting requests. I also regularly take on outside work to make ends meet.

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 in the workplace, it is shameful that the University of Maryland system would 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/ PhD Candidate, Department of History  
1151 W. Cross St. Baltimore, MD 21230  
Fanning@umd.edu

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations 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 set a 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 is 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 with improved life balance, a benefit that makes way for great success in graduate school. Moreover, much of that success is a reflection of a given 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, then the University must accept the responsibility of maintaining a professional relationship with graduate student employees. Simply allowing for the right to collectively bargain, if students so choose, as dictated in MD HB214, seems incremental progress in a forward-thinking direction in this regard. Thanks to the Committee for consideration of MD HB214.

Sincerely,

Chris Samoray  
Masters, Plant Science & Landscape Architecture  
Graduate Assistant  
2139 Plant Sciences Building, 4291 Fieldhouse Drive, College Park, MD 20742, ATTN: Chris Samoray  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
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Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

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Sincerely,

Chris Samoray  
Masters, Plant Science & Landscape Architecture  
Graduate Assistant  
2139 Plant Sciences Building, 4291 Fieldhouse Drive, College Park, MD 20742, ATTN: Chris Samoray  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a graduate assistant and student at UMCP, I spend well over 40 hours per week on campus. My responsibilities at work have grown exponentially and the expectation that I take on new tasks has similarly risen. It is expected of me to remain as a “yes man” within the college to pick up any slack left by the full time faculty and staff. Without the hard work of the graduate students across campus, the university would not be able to function properly to maintain its high academic standards.

Throughout my tenure on campus, I have continually experienced severe anxiety like so many others; my anxiety stems from my increased work responsibilities, classwork, as well as my economic well-being. The thought of paying rent at the beginning of the month or rationing my already limited shopping cart at the grocery store sends me into a spiral because our stipends do not allow us the ability to save anything we receive. It’s ironic that we do not receive a livable wage yet we are expected to keep the doors open at the university. We are educators, researchers, administrators, and advisors yet it is increasingly clear that we are underappreciated for all of our hard work.

With all of our responsibilities and anxieties, it would make sense that some well deserved time off would be needed. However, given my 12 month contract, I am expected to be in the office every single week of the year (including all breaks). I do not receive any time off (paid or unpaid). If I would like to take some time off, I can either be told “no” or I can be told that I have to make those hours up before I leave (I have experienced both scenarios). Last semester, it took me three weeks of 60+ hours on campus to make up that time so I could travel back home to attend my brother’s wedding. That is simply outrageous and unfair. I should not be expected to place my work duties before my own brother’s wedding or to fear my supervisor telling me that I cannot leave because I have not made up my hours.

This is clearly a system designed to keep the powerful in power and to suppress the powerless. Quite frankly, I expect more from a world class institution like the University of Maryland and I urge you all to support HB 214 to grant us collective bargaining rights.

Sincerely,

Devon Mohondro  
Master of Public Policy ‘20, School of Public Policy

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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Please pass HB 214 and legalize collective bargaining rights for all of Maryland's graduate employees as soon as possible.

The cost-of-living around College Park is far too low compared to our wages and the value we bring to the University of Maryland. Many graduate students suffer silently in borderline poverty living situation due to the high rent costs in College Park and surrounding areas, and the overall high cost of living here. Many students are too overrun with work to fight for higher wages and better health care and better work-life balance on their own. This is why legalizing collective bargaining rights for Maryland graduate employees is a MUST. When we actually count up all the hours we put in from teaching, research and separate required learning (to actually conduct good research), we are often times paid at or less than the national hourly wage of \$7.25 per hour. This is absolutely unacceptable considering the unique and nuanced role we play in the university's ecosystem.

Additionally, when you receive a fellowship, you do not get the same health plan options as if you were a student. They are much more limited, and often worse. Many students have to pay out of pocket to some extent because if they need a better health insurance plan outside of the university, as it might be more expensive than the money given to cover your healthcare under the fellowship. Graduate students need collective bargaining rights.

Please consider legalize collective bargaining rights for us.

Sincerely,

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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am about to begin my final semester in the Master of Library and Information Science program at UMD. In my time as a graduate employee I have both experienced firsthand and seen from my peers a host of injustices and indignities. Among other issues, there seems to be something of a tradition of coercing graduate employees into working more hours than agreed upon and paying them insufficient salaries (“stipends”) for the cost of living. There is no way to hold advisors or supervisors accountable without fear of retaliation, but when the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC) tells the Graduate School about these problems, as it has been for years, the Graduate School responds with shrugs and denials.

Our one recourse is the “meet and confer” process in which GAAC meets with Graduate School representatives once each semester to discuss graduate employees’ concerns. I am a member of GAAC, and having been to more than one of these sessions, I can confirm that the process is nothing more than a bad joke. The Graduate School’s representatives are evasive, unhelpful, and uninterested. The meetings follow a pattern: GAAC will bring up an issue – most often one that has been raised in several previous “meet and confer” sessions – and the Graduate School administrators will say that there is nothing they can do: it is an issue only solvable by individual departments, or they don’t believe the problem is a real problem, or they don’t have the resources to spare to take even *modest* steps to address the problem... and so on.

Graduate employees must have the right to collective bargaining. We don’t have the power to change our circumstances; right now, the only thing we can do is make administrators a little uncomfortable at these meetings once every semester. This isn’t enough. Many of us are in debt; many of us are supporting families. We must be able to have a meaningful say in our working conditions and livelihoods. *This bill won’t necessarily even result in the formation of a union.* All we are asking is the *right* to collective bargaining, as any other employees – and make no mistake, we are employees: we are doing work for the university, and we are being paid for it. (Whatever you may hear in the hearings, the idea that I am an “apprentice” is laughable. I am a worker.)

Please support the long-overdue passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Duncan Griffin  
MLIS, UMD iSchool  
Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
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Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I write to you today about collective bargaining for graduate students. While classified as students, we perform and assist with many of the core goals of a university: education and research. While vital to the university, we are put in a vulnerable position, by law. The frequent issues that students encounter with supervisors and employers can only face the brick wall of the university administration which has no incentive to improve the situation. This causes a lot of stress and is to the detriment of the quality of the education system. By allowing students to collectively bargain we gain a tool to ensure a safe and effective work environment for all.

Sincerely,

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Research Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I urge you to support this legislation which grants collective bargaining rights to graduate employees at institutions of higher education in Maryland. I strongly contend that our labor should be valued as it would be in any other context. Our current situation leaves us without any concrete leverage with which to advocate for ourselves.

I am entering my fourth semester as a Teaching Assistant at UMCP. So far, my experience has been mostly positive, though I am aware of many troubling issues put forth by colleagues in my department and in other departments. I support this bill because I believe it is immoral to deny the right of collective bargaining to working people, whether or not they happen to be students, and because negotiations with administrators have largely failed to adequately address the well-established issues that have been raised in the past by the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC). I have witnessed firsthand the evasiveness and indifference that administrators have shown towards these issues in meetings with GAAC representatives.

As for specific issues, the wages currently received by graduate student workers do not support even the most modest lifestyle in the DC/College Park area. As a personal example, in 2019, the difference between my monthly paycheck and my monthly rent payment was \$90.10. This means that 90% of my paycheck went to rent, leaving me \$90.10 for transportation, food, tuition payments, mandatory fees, medical expenses, and other necessities. I do not need to tell you that that is not enough; even if I worked twice the hours I currently do, I would barely be scraping by. While I have been living on external limited financial resources, many of my colleagues must take outside work in order to supplement their graduate assistant income, while struggling to meet the demands of a full time graduate-level course load. Most students are not as fortunate as I am; some are supporting families on incomes like this, and many more are in debt. It is unacceptable that we do not have the power to change these circumstances.

We know that administrators are invested in our success, because it is our success which defines the University. However, the only leverage we have right now is the empathy of our faculty and administration in hearing our concerns. Though this may occasionally produce a better working environment for us, it is unacceptable for us to not have the right to advocate for representation should we ever feel the need to. Granting student workers like us the right to collectively bargain would serve as a first step in recognizing the contributions we make to Maryland's institutions.

Please support the long-overdue passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Emma Podietz

Master of Landscape Architecture Candidate

Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture

Teaching Assistant

University of Maryland, College Park, School of Agriculture and Natural Resources

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Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to implore you to support HB 214 and grant graduate assistants the right to collectively bargain. As the GSG representative of the interdisciplinary Neuroscience And Cognitive Science (NACS) program, I hear from students from many different departments with different funding situations. However, there is one thread common to everyone - our contracts state that we are being compensated for 20 hours of work a week, while all of us are expected to put in at least 40 and a majority of senior students get closer to 60. At the same time, our mentors rely on us to do our so they can continue to attract external funding (through the Brain and Behavior Initiative Seed Grant program, we brought in \$10 mil on a \$1 mil investment from the university. I can assure you that this 10 to 1 return of investment would not have happened if only professors had done the work.) We recognize that our careers require a serious time commitment, but we should at least be compensated fairly for the effort we put in. Too many people in my program are getting burned out, not because of academic stress, but because they're worried about taking on even more loans to make ends meet even as they're publishing high-impact papers and increasing the prestige of the university.

We need a living wage. We need legal, enforceable contracts. We need guaranteed benefits. We need a third-party grievance policy. And we only ask for the tools needed to attain these basic Guarantees. Passing HB 214 and granting us the right to collectively bargain would allow us at least a modicum of say in how we're treated and compensated, in addition to simply being the fair thing to do.

Sincerely,

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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

We ask you to support and pass HB 214, to legalize collective bargaining rights for all Maryland's higher education public employees.

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 HB 214, 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.

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.

When you consider HB 214, keeping the points I covered above in mind, please ask yourselves how else failure to pass HB 214 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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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 214 and strongly urge the State of Maryland to recognize the crucial right of graduate students to collectively bargain. Last year, as a second-year fulltime 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 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,

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Research Assistant & Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations 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 HB 214 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  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to express my support to the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (HB 214). I am a first year Ph.D. student in the department of Physics, University of Maryland. Graduate Assistant being underpaid is not a uncommon thing in the United States. While many states in this country had ensured the collective bargaining right for grad student, it is absence for Maryland, one of the most developed state in US. Without my explanation and evidences, how labor Union had helped protect the right of workers is a known fact and there is not reason such right is not been protected for graduate workers. As a important group of the university, graduate student worker ensure the quality of teaching and research of the university. We worked hard but we kept struggling for living. The right of graduate workers cannot rely on gesture of the university admins just likes the right of workers cannot rely on gesture of the capitalists, even the working condition is 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,

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Research Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am a second year PhD Student in the Mechanical Engineering Department at the University of Maryland. I am writing to express my support and interest in you passing this bill for collective bargaining rights for graduate students.

I am happy and honored to be studying for a PhD at the University of Maryland, and grateful for the opportunities and resources my adviser and department have provided for me thus far. I support this bill because I consider myself and my colleagues employees of the University of Maryland, and believe the State should recognize and grant us the corresponding rights. As graduate students we fulfill contractual obligations for the benefit of the University of Maryland that are often independent of our studies in exchange for compensation for our living expenses. It is time to allow for serious and necessary negotiations between graduate student employees and the University of Maryland in addressing concerns that both parties would benefit in resolving.

My first year as a PhD student I spent ten to fifteen hours a week on the weekends and after hours in a highly technical part time consulting role for a small company to help pay for the high cost of living in College Park. This work was not meant to interfere with my on campus work, but the exhaustion of working part time off campus while also working full time on campus likely affected my studies. Graduate student employees must have the right to negotiate salaries when we are clearly living off of poverty wages in an expensive area. Graduate employees must be able to negotiate fees the university demands, like \$800 mandatory fees that student employees must pay from our low salary to support on campus shuttles and gyms that I do not use.

Mostly however, I hope you will pass this bill for the many more graduate student employees that are more unfortunate than I. I'll paraphrase an example from one of my colleagues in another department. As an international student from China, she worked on a third party lab that was unrelated to her research for two years to compensate for funding her advisor who brought her across the world no longer had. When she asked about changing her dissertation topic (not the research she was working for pay, the research she was doing to graduate), her advisor verbally agreed to her idea while behind her back requested from his connections that she stop receiving pay from the third party lab. They did not even notify her. They allowed her to work in their office for an entire additional month before she noticed that she was no longer being paid by them. Her department did not help her get an alternative position, and after having lost a month unaware of being unemployed she was at risk of not being able to renew her student visa.

She was powerless and there was no system in place to help her. I cannot imagine fearing having to abandon two years of study because of some ridiculous decision by a careless man. The systems to protect University of Maryland employees like her can only be properly addressed by collective bargaining from all graduate employees.

Sincerely,

Lautaro Cilenti  
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Graduate Research Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I would like to express my unconditional support of HB 214 and to implore the members of this committee to support it as well.

I serve presently 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 we do have the ability to obtain compensation accurate 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. 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.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Galloway

Phd Student, Anthropology

Research Assistant

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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations 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,

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Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 214 and strongly urge the State of Maryland to recognize the graduate students at public universities as the employees with the same rights as all other state employees. We do an extraordinary amount of work beyond our own studies including assisting research and teaching. The University of Maryland as a Research 1 institution is in a great need of researchers to contribute to the excellence of academics, therefore, we work on different research projects concurrently and stay up late every day to ensure the progress. We are also the teachers who work with undergraduates and graduates on a daily basis, preparing their educational resources, answering their questions in time, leading them to do projects that related to their professions. 20 hours per week is our least working time if you would like to complete these tasks in a satisfactory manner, however, the number of 20 hours is the reality that we have little impact on in the contracts and the basis on which our stipend is calculated. Facing the increasing demand for the work from the university, all graduate employees tend to work beyond 40 and even 60 hours per week. Graduate employees are indispensable part to the university for both researching and teaching, we hope the State of Maryland recognize this as such by passing HB 270 and finally giving us the rights we deserve as the state employees.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

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Research Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Sara Ludewig and I am a dual degree Master's student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I also work as an administrative graduate assistant for the university. In my position as an Academic Advisor for Undergraduate Students in the History Department, I provide academic and career advice, administrative support, and general guidance to over 300 students majoring in History and over 100 students minoring in history. My co-advisor and I conduct valuable work to support the academic work of the department. Without our recruitment efforts, career advice, academic advising, course enrollment management, and registration help the department and university would not be able to function. Yet, I am not paid a living wage. As a result of the inadequate pay provided by the university, I work a second job on campus. In addition to my 20 hours a week as a graduate assistant, I also work 10 hours as a student assistant at the University Libraries, and, as a full-time graduate student, I take 9 credit hours of coursework. The work I conduct in both of my positions is both personally fulfilling and of crucial importance to the daily functions of the university. However, the university considers me, and the work I am passionate about, expendable and not worthy of basic rights and protections, including the right to advocate for myself alongside other graduate student assistants.

I urge you to support HB214, a bill that will provide us with the right to collectively bargain. If graduate students are to be valued members of the university community, at the very least, we should be provided with a voice in our working conditions and in the future of work on campus.

Sincerely,

Sara Ludewig  
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Administrative Graduate Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Graduate students do the work of many faculty and staff at the University of Maryland and our work is essential to campus daily life. In addition to teaching as a standalone instructor of courses, many of us are called upon to write letters of recommendation and act as references for current and former students. We care about the students we teach and deserve to be treated like professional members of the community whose work is valuable. We matter and the university system could not operate without us.

We deserve to be officially considered to be what we effectively are: employees.

Sincerely,

Sarah Vick  
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Graduate Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

71.428571428% is the percentage of my stipend that I have to spend on housing if I want to live close to UMD and in a room not shared with a roommate, which does not seem like a demanding need.

If the rationale behind fully funded PhD programs is providing people -- who are at least intellectually qualified -- an amount of money that's just enough to free them from worrying basic living needs, meanwhile, respecting their basic intellectual dignity, it appears that UMD is failing in this perspective. In my experience, it's almost impossible to rely on my stipend to get through if I have regular meals like any functional human being will.

And many graduate students are actually not seeking wealth -- at least not at this stage -- but striving to contribute to researches that are challenging and, in many cases, significantly important to our society. But as far as I know most of graduate assistants are being overworked and underpaid, which is probably the worst combination that could happen to any worker.

I believe we do deserve better working environment where reasonable opinions can get reasonable amount of attention and discussion. Therefore, I urge you to support the HB 214 bill before you today as well as the citizens and workers who are here before you asking to be recognized.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Shuangqi Luo  
PhD student, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering  
Teaching Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Stanley Maxson and I am a Ph.D. candidate in U.S. History at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing today because I believe that the contingencies of graduate work make collective bargaining a necessity. I am in my fifth year at the University of Maryland. Throughout my time as a graduate student, I have seen issues persist unchanged from the generation of graduate students before me and I am sad to watch them continue for new graduate students. Among these issues are inadequate pay, unequal pay for equal work, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and inadequate mental health services. These issues put a strain on individual graduate students, the departments they call home, and the university as a whole. Without the power of collective bargaining, graduate students have been unable to adequately represent ourselves to departments, the university, and legislators and advocate for the health of our university system.

Sincerely,

Stanley Maxson  
Ph.D. candidate, Department of History  
Graduate Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to urge your support for the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (HB 214). I have been a PhD student in the Department of Physics for over four years and have worked as both a Research and Teaching Assistant at the University of Maryland.

To say the work done by Graduate Assistants is valuable to the university is an understatement; without our contributions the university would cease to function. While professors do the important work of giving lectures and securing grant funding, many of the laborious aspects of education and research done at the university require large pools of graduate student working many hours a week to get done. From leading small discussion sections to grading exams, maintaining lab equipment, and conducting much of the actual research itself, the university needs Graduate Assistants to produce the top notch education and research we are known for.

With the functioning and prestige of the university dependent on a strong graduate student body, I'm afraid that we are vulnerable to losing some outstanding candidates due to working conditions of Graduate Assistants. The cost of living in the DC metro area is one of the highest in the country and the typical salaries we see as graduate students leave few affordable options available and little room to save money and achieve financial security. Graduate student lifestyles are often ones of precarity and many talented candidates will choose to move to industry instead of pursuing graduate degrees, seeing the endeavor as a choice of lost wages and lifestyle sacrifices. Those that do enter graduate education may also choose other universities due to better pay and benefits.

As essential contributors to the university we deserve the right to organize for better working conditions, and that is why I am writing to urge support for the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (HB 214).

Sincerely,

Troy Sewell  
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Graduate Research Assistant  
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Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Michael A. Jackson, Vice Chair  
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HB 214  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Appropriations 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 HB 214.

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](mailto:yhao@umd.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Yeming Hao  
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College Park, MD 20742  
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