

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

SB 658
Supporting

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

I am writing to urge your support for the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (SB 658). 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 (SB 658).

Sincerely,

Troy Sewell
PhD Student, Department of Physics
Graduate Research Assistant
6907 6th St NW, Washington, DC 20012
tjsewell@gmail.com