

Delores G. Kelley, Chair, 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 a second-year graduate student in the Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (NACS) program at University of Maryland, and a father of two elementary school aged children. I am writing to ask the MD legislature to pass the SB 658/HB 214 collective bargaining bill.

While I have never been a high income earner, starting a Phd program and being expected to survive on such a meager stipend is exploitative. Since we are expected to produce professional quality work, we should be compensated accordingly. Further, we have been told that if we obtain grant money from an external source, much of which goes straight to the university, 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. These issues, among many others, are why we need collective bargaining power--to come up with equitable solutions to benefit student workers and the university alike.

Beyond the specific case of University of Maryland, this is a larger societal issue. Under our current administration, fact-based reasoning and institutes of higher education have come under attack. Combined with the fact that various industries are picking off our brightest students, American academic institutions are currently experiencing a 'brain-drain'. This may not be felt immediately, but we are beginning to see how other nations are catching up to our leading position in science and technology. I am not advocating for competitive nationalism, but simply to retain the strengths that we, as a nation, have held for so long. Here again, one of the major systemic solutions that can be offered at the legislative level is empowering our graduate student workers.

I truly hope that you take a proactive approach in recognizing graduate student workers as workers, and pass the SB 658/HB 214 collective bargaining bill.

Sincerely,

Junaid S Merchant, MS
PhD Student in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (NACS)
Research Assistant, Psychology Department
0112 Biology-Psychology Bldg
College Park, MD 20742 merchantjs@gmail.com