

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 urge you to support SB 658, and to reverse the ban on collective bargaining rights for graduate students at all schools in the University of Maryland system.

When I was first visiting the University of Maryland, and in the middle of deciding where to attend graduate school, I was surprised to find out that the graduate students were not unionized. I had already visited other Big 10 universities, specifically Michigan State University. The graduate students there emphasized how well the graduate student union had advocated on their behalf and brought stability to both their lives and jobs. The cost of living in East Lansing, MI is \$23,543, 1 Adult, 0 Children. The cost of living in Prince George's County, MD is \$36,492, 1 Adult, 0 Children (these numbers are from the MIT Living Wage Calculator (<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>)). I was offered \$5,000 less in my stipend from the University of Maryland when compared to Michigan State University. The lack of a graduate student union at the University of Maryland, and the disproportionate pay to cost of living, weighed on my decision and almost pushed me to attend graduate school elsewhere. However, the research opportunities offered to me here, at Maryland, were too great for me to pass up.

Halfway through my first year in graduate school, I have not started research, and I am funded through a Teaching Assistantship. In this appointment, I am expected to work 20 hours a week. I almost always exceed this expectation. Between in person hours with students (10 hours a week), prep meetings with course instructors (2 hours a week), and grading (typically 10 hours a week), the only times I do not go over a combined 20 hours a week are when there is a lighter week than normal. I recognize that this is a very specific example, some of my fellow graduate students teach courses that require less of them, but there are also graduate students that have more responsibilities in their Teaching Assistantship. There have been various efforts within my specific department, Physics, to address this issue. However, the students asking for change are at an inherent disadvantage due to the power structures at play. The department does not have to negotiate with graduate students, if they change anything it is because the faculty advocates for it. Due to this uneven power dynamic, the solution to the over working of Teaching Assistants is an "Expectations" document that Teaching Assistants and the instructor they work with fill out and agree to at the beginning of the semester. However, there is no requirement that this is completed, or any formal method for addressing when the agreement is broken. The instructors I have worked for have never brought up the idea of completing this form with me, I have always had to ask them to do it. Other Teaching Assistants may have not done this if they were in the

same position as me, again due to the power dynamics at play. This leads to many Teaching Assistants in the Physics department being overworked without a way to resolve their situation.

The lack of collective bargaining rights for graduate students is an analogous situation, but on a larger scale. As graduate students, we can *ask* for better cost of living increases, we can *ask* for better support and more fair labor practices, we can *ask* for equitable treatment of students, but we have no power to actually negotiate these requests. The *administration* can decide to sit down with us, *they* can decide if they will listen to us, *they* can decide if anything changes. But the graduate students have no power to negotiate anything. This leads to instability in our lives and leaves us helpless in our position within the University.

Graduate students should have the right to negotiate our position within the University. We are employees, but without the right for us to negotiate with the administration, we are seen more as a resource without a voice in our employment. I ask that you please support SB 658, and empower us graduate students to have a say in our terms of employment and allow us to bring more stability to our lives.

Sincerely,

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