

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 legislation granting collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants, who play the roles of employees in every way, at universities in Maryland.

I am entering my second semester as a graduate research assistant in the Physics Department at University of Maryland - College Park. The level of disconnect between what the administration claims is expected of graduate students and my actual experience as a graduate assistant is stupendous. Never have I met a graduate student that only works 20 hours a week - this is laughable, as this would take a PhD student 10 years to complete the graduate requirements and meet the research rigor expectations at a university!

The University administration has argued that we make enough money by quoting numbers for bare necessities. Given those numbers, if I were to incur an accident or medical emergency, I would not be able to afford my PhD anymore. It is dehumanizing to pay GAs only enough to survive and not expect us to do things like travel or see a concert. And I am still one of the fortunate ones, for GAs in some of the other departments are more severely underpaid than us.

In an ideal world with laws that looked out for graduate workers, I would not be pushing for collective bargaining. Sadly, that is not the case in Maryland. At my undergraduate institution, Princeton University, graduate students were paid about \$34,000 every year in stipends, even though the cost of living there is not that different from here. At UMD the graduate stipend is \$17,802 for a 9-month assistantship and \$23,736 for a 12-month assistantship. After taxes and mandatory fees, this is only enough to make ends meet but not to lead healthy and balanced lives. And it is becoming grimly apparent that the university administration will not look out for its graduate workers either.

Collective bargaining will lend a much needed voice to graduate workers who are the lifeblood of this university, yet are often exploited by professors and the administration. Without it, we cannot negotiate better pay or deal with exploitive faculty.

Sincerely,

Debopriyo Biswas
PhD Student, Physics

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