

UMBC TESTIMONY ON SB658

Edited by Alex M. Rittle, UMBC GSA President

The UMBC Graduate Student Association, along with UMBC Administration and Staff and the University System of Maryland, are submitting unfavorable testimony to SB658. It is our opinion that the proposed right to collective bargaining produces several risks and uncertainties, which we express through three main points:

- 1) The right to collectively bargain, absent a formal vote for unionization, produces concerns that GAs would be considered university employees. There are **several fees and exemptions that Graduate Students may incur** as a result of this policy including higher healthcare premiums, and potential loss of tax exemptions. UMBC Graduate Assistants are not considered employees, which allows them to be in a separate Health Insurance pool in which departments absorb the cost of premiums for students. Conversely, UMBC employees generally pay about 20% of their plan premiums out of their paycheck, and the overall cost is significantly higher. We fear that students may have to pay this premium if considered employees through passage of this bill.
- 2) Graduate Students currently interact with the Graduate School and campus administration through a policy known as **Meet and Confer**. In addition to allowing Graduate Students the opportunity to consult with an attorney on employment issues, this policy allows for significant flexibility in working with the administration, which has led to protection of healthcare premium coverage through efforts by our Graduate Assistant Advisory Council; a regular collecting of graduate student input on student and campus fees, and an atmosphere of shared governance which allows for the free flow of ideas and concerns across various campus entities, just to name a few examples. We fear losing that relationship once the right to collective bargain is enacted.
- 3) We are discouraged by a clear lack of comprehensive documentation by bill sponsors over the specific implications of the right to unionize and collectively bargain, as mentioned in the previous two points. Previous iterations of similar bills in prior years have led to a lack of clear communication with UMBC students. **The current position of the Graduate Student Association at UMBC is that before supporting SB658, we would need to see more evidence from proponents of the bill to show that the anticipated benefits of collective bargaining are in excess of those provided already by Meet and Confer.**

We highly encourage elected officials to reject passage of this bill. Thank you for your consideration and concern for the well-being of graduate students at UMBC, which collectively represent the second largest body of graduate students in the Maryland System.