

The University of Maryland Graduate Student Government
Testimony for HB1295
Appropriations Committee, Tuesday, Mar. 16, 2021
University System of Maryland - Student Fees - Review and Retention
Position: FAVORABLE

As a recent undergraduate student leader who graduated last spring and as the current president of the Graduate Student Government (GSG), I have witnessed the effects of this reversion on the entirety of our student body. Student organizations that are funded via student fees exist solely to serve their respective constituencies. For the University to sweep money back from these organizations is to directly steal from the students themselves.

The GSG represents over 10,000 graduate students at the University of Maryland. We do so on a limited budget, provided by a graduate student fee, that covers assistantship stipends, research, grants, programming, and other operational costs. Our budget is specifically designed to cover yearly expenses and does not allot for sizable surpluses over time. What additional fund balances GSG had managed to accrue was ultimately slashed by the reversion, damaging the organization's ability to help financially strained graduate students. This year, the pandemic has limited the enrollment of graduate students at the University of Maryland. Because of this, GSG's budget is already limited more than usual. Another reversion would force our organization to cut assistantships, defund research grants, and eliminate future programming.

The graduate student fee does not only exist to fund GSG. Graduate students' fee money also funds the Graduate Student Legal Aid Office (GLAO). GLAO was operating with a substantial temporary surplus due to a position being cut not long before the reversion. That surplus was intended to cover additional benefits for newly structured contracted positions within the office. As of now, GLAO is moving forward with the ability to cover these benefits; however if another reversion were to occur it seems financially impossible for GLAO to maintain its entire staff in its current capacity. As a crucial legal service provider for so many graduate students, I fear the fundamental damage another reversion to GLAO's budget could cause the graduate student population.

In order to prevent a future fund reversion that could irreparably damage my organization's finances, we urge this committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.