

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 521
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I write to you in support of SB 521 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. Labor rights are fundamental to a functioning and fair society; this holds no exception in the realm of academics. Our higher education system is built upon the idea of passing down generations of knowledge for new minds to apply and expand upon. As a graduate student in the Astronomy department, I recognize the immense wealth of knowledge serving as a foundation to the work I do every day.

As graduate students, we act in the role of both master and apprentice; I have taught undergraduates in astronomy and mathematics to prepare them for wherever their futures take them, and am myself taught how to pursue complex research questions and successfully communicate that work to a broader scientific community. Although I enjoy my opportunities in both respects, I know too many students who carry the weight of extreme financial insecurity on top of these responsibilities.

This insecurity has developed over decades of ill treatment. Graduate students have been increasingly exploited with little, if any, fair compensation. Upon completing a PhD or Master's degree, students are thrown into a dismal job market already extremely competitive before being decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For any graduate, the economic reality of academia coupled with being extensively overworked is devastating to mental health.

This has been ingrained in the perceived culture of academia. Institutions rely on the exploitation of these workers, promoting it as a stepping stone in a veritable *cursus honorum* in tenured positions they continue to replace with more graduate positions. There is no mincing words here; this problem is driven by an increasing desire for profits over education and a disturbing trend towards business-like management of Maryland academic institutions. All of this comes at the expense of the graduate students these institutions rely on to maintain the institutional mission the State of Maryland has given them.

Passing SB 521 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act is an important step in the process of remedying this fundamental flaw in our public institutions. Marylanders rely on our academic institutions to promote scholarship, invest in the future of Maryland, and enable innovation. The present environment fails to fulfill this mission to its fullest extent. Economic justice and financial security will go a long way in reversing the exploitation that impairs the fundamental mission of our university system.

Sincerely,

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