

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 am writing in support of SB 658 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act.

We, graduate students, deserve the right to organize as any other employees and this should be enough, but it hasn't been in the past many years and I will try to follow with some arguments that we should take into account.

Graduate students are an incredible high skilled work force in this country, making universities work the way they do. However, grad students recognition is below anything that I've experienced.

We do not have fixed work hours, we are supposed to work whenever our adviser tells us to, none of the extra hours or night shifts are paid because we live in the false pretense that science should be a work for the ones that really want this in their lives, despite having no reassurance that this will be our future (because no matter how hard we work, a position as a professor or a tenure are never guaranteed). And yet we are the work force that gives prestige and recognition to our University.

In our duties we are supposed to teach, to run experiments in the lab, to write papers and in the meantime advance with our dissertation - our own project. But the conditions we have when we start grad school are far from optimal and I start with the most striking one.

Our payment.

We have to choose to live in houses that are not friendly to a working environment just because it is cheaper, or just because we want to have a car and need that money for car insurance or because we have student debt that needs to be paid. We have to lose ourselves in financial adjustments and to figure out how many meals out we can have because the money might not be enough until the end of the month. Why don't we cook it ourselves? We wish we could do it all the time but unfortunately the late nights at work sometimes do not allow the time to do it. We often live in decrepit houses just to have enough money to travel somewhere at a certain time of the year. And talking about traveling, we often do not have any vacation stipulated in our rights. This is something that we have to manage with our adviser under no contract or vacations days. and When we do, we are often bound to money constraints because we can't even rent a car for a full week.

I am an international student which means that I like to go see my family at least once a year, but in the first 3 years here, those visits could only happen if and only my family paid for my trip because I couldn't save enough money.

These are the struggles of being a grad student and I am afraid that this is a burden that is too big

to carry for many of us. The negative view surrounding Grad School is dire, and often perceived as a terrible choice in life, instead of being something to be proud of, something to be grateful that we can do our work in an intellectual environment of learning and growth.

We deserve to be heard, we deserve to have our rights in contracts that protects us from our superiors and more than that, we deserve to be paid accordingly to the work that we do.

We deserve the right to organize, so that we could secure workplace protections in all forms : from sexual harassment, abuse, and retribution for raising concerns --- that ensure safe working environments.

Sincerely,

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