

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,

Members of the legislature, I am writing to you to ask that you support SB 0521. I am an alumnus graduate research assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park campus. As a native Houstonian and transplant to the DMV area, the shock of higher cost of living with minimal pay differences from University of Houston's main campus was not lost on me. Where I was able to afford a car and gas to commute long distances within the Houston area, I am yet to be able to afford multiple trips into Washington DC, at a mere 7 mile distance, in my five years in the DMV.

I am writing to you to ask your support for this bill as collective bargaining offers an effective means to address not only cost of living and healthcare concerns, but most importantly, fulfilling employment rights and responsibilities of student employees. When research and graduate assistants do not have a way to formally and bindingly negotiate with the university to address labor and employment issues, they are unable to contribute productively to not only their employer, but society at large. This is evident from multiple studies that have shown that at least one-third to half of PhD students suffer from mental health challenges [1][2]. SB 0521 would reduce student worries and thus, mental load, stemming from lack of official duties, financial and healthcare concerns. This additionally ties in to not only maintaining a healthy workforce but also retaining talent within the nation, limiting brain drain to other countries, furthermore, ensuring that national security is not compromised.

Many of my old and new colleagues have already testified to the details of damages, mental or otherwise, incurred as a result of lack of worker's rights in the University student employment system. I hope that I was able to make a clear and direct connection between having an educated, healthy pipeline of innovators to ultimately, the safety and security of our nation. Your support of SB 0251 is paramount to the future of our country and I urge you to vote in favor of it.

[1] E. Pain, "Ph.D. students face significant mental health challenges," *Science* (80-.), Apr. 2017.

[2] K. Levecque, F. Anseel, A. De Beuckelaer, J. Van der Heyden, and L. Gisle, "Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students," *Res. Policy*, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 868–879, May 2017.

Sincerely,
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