

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 urge you to support SB 521, and to reverse the ban on collective bargaining rights for graduate students at all schools in the University of Maryland system.

In this past year I saw the damage that COVID-19 has caused to many of my fellow graduate students, and specifically how the lack of collective bargaining rights contributed to their strife. I have always supported the efforts to grant these rights to graduate students. Last year I wrote testimony to the Assembly outlining the multiple ways in which graduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park are vulnerable to be taken advantage of in their positions and how graduate students at other Big Ten universities have protections in place that we do not.

My concerns were brought to realization when COVID-19 caused catastrophic cuts to the university system. In our offer letters from our department, graduate students are guaranteed 2 full years of a Teaching Assistantship before they are required to move to a Research Assistantship. However, over the course of last summer, the Associate Chair of Graduate Education in our department began threatening first and second year students with the possibility of cutting their Teaching Assistantships. This was an effort to force students in Research Assistantships and free up departmental funds. Graduate students in my department, including myself, had to work tirelessly to push back on our department's attempts to coerce students by threatening to take away what was promised in their offer letters.

Graduate students are professionals and are the essential workers of the higher education system and university research enterprise. We are the ones that keep undergraduate courses running, even during a pandemic. Without our work, the university system would fall apart. We deserve to have the promises made to us kept. And we deserve to have stability in our employment, especially during a pandemic. This will only be ensured through securing our rights to collectively bargain.

Sincerely,

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