

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,

If there has ever been a time to do what it right, this is it. We are in a significant economic, social, and public health crisis, but we are also in a key moment for meaningful political change. Passing Senate Bill 521 is but one crucial step to help protect workers' rights and invest in the lives of all who live, work, and learn in the state of Maryland.

I am writing to express my strongest of the right of graduate student workers to collectively bargain, and I see that as a win for the state of Maryland and for higher education. Graduate student employees at the University of Maryland provide crucial, extensive, and diverse labor in the form of research, teaching, and administrative tasks that are all essential to the operation of this university. The State of Maryland has already recognized the right of other workers at our state university to collectively bargain. The exclusion of workers who are also graduate students is unacceptable and should be immediately corrected. The right to collectively bargain is now an established right of graduate student workers in states that are home to the country's top-ranking public research universities – such California, Michigan, Illinois, Washington, and New Jersey. These universities include existing and aspirational peer institutions for the University of Maryland, as well as fellow members of the Big Ten. They also join many other states, such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Iowa, Oregon, and our neighboring state of Delaware in recognizing this important right. Leading private universities such as Columbia University and New York University also recognize this shared right of all private and public sector workers. At these universities, it has been shown that a recognized work force benefits not only workers but also the educational experience of its students and the status of its research record. I served for five years as Director of Graduate Studies in my department, and we lost many of our top recruits to our program in favor of those at the University of California, University of Michigan, Rutgers University, and New York University in large part due to the kind of support these schools offer to an organized and recognized graduate student work force. There is no contradiction that graduate students are both students and workers, in this case at the same institution; the contradiction is only that the latter status is denied, eroding the integrity of the university itself.

If the University of Maryland wants to maintain and improve its status among the ranks of the best universities in this country, it is imperative that it, too, recognize all of its workers. Moreover, this public health crisis has made it even more visible how important it is that all

workers have the right to be active participants in shaping the conditions of their labor. It is crucial that states like Maryland stand up and reiterate their long-standing support for all of the people who live and work there, and to provide a strong, forward-thinking model that will continue to demonstrate Maryland's status as a leader.

Sincerely,

Christina Hanhardt

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