

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 a first-year student pursuing my MFA in Studio Art at the University of Maryland, College Park. I support this campaign because as both contracted workers and full time students, we deserve collective bargaining rights to insure fair and safe treatment in the workplace, negotiation for contracts and stipends, and the right to fight for other benefits and protections as a recognized labor organization.

In the history of student labor organizing, many colleges and university administrations have fought student worker's unions on the basis that students are students, and thus their primary function is to learn, not to work. Yet thought we are students, we are also workers and employees of the state of Maryland. For many of us, our stipends and assistantships are our sole income to support ourselves and often to help support our households or family members.

The ability to bargain collectively would grant me and my fellow student-workers greater security in our jobs. I know I would have greater confidence in negotiating my contract and expressing my desire in the areas of conditions, salary, and job protections. I would feel less fear of reprimand or dismissal from my program if I knew my contract was equitably bargained for and not just the matter of internal and administrative decision making. I would love to understand with transparency how state funds are distributed to GAs and other graduate workers. As a state worker of Maryland, I want to be able to collectively bargain for my rights with my peers and unionize should we choose to do so.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I moved to Maryland to begin grad school. My partner who relocated with me struggled with their job placement in the healthcare field (due to medical scribes being used less in clinical settings during the pandemic), and they were out of work for several months due to this underemployment. During this time, I was in my first semester ever of TA-ing at UMD. I didn't really know my rights as a Graduate Assistant or feel a sense of community with other graduate workers. I paid for all of my household's expenses this fall with my GA salary, which barely covered it—if I did not have even the slight financial safety net that I am lucky to have, I would have had to find other employment to supplement my salary, which would have strongly impeded my success in the MFA program. With collective bargaining in place, I would have had more resources and community to draw on when I struggled, as well as an awareness of options for advocating for more COVID-19 financial protections or an increased salary with the broader graduate student worker community.

Sincerely,

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